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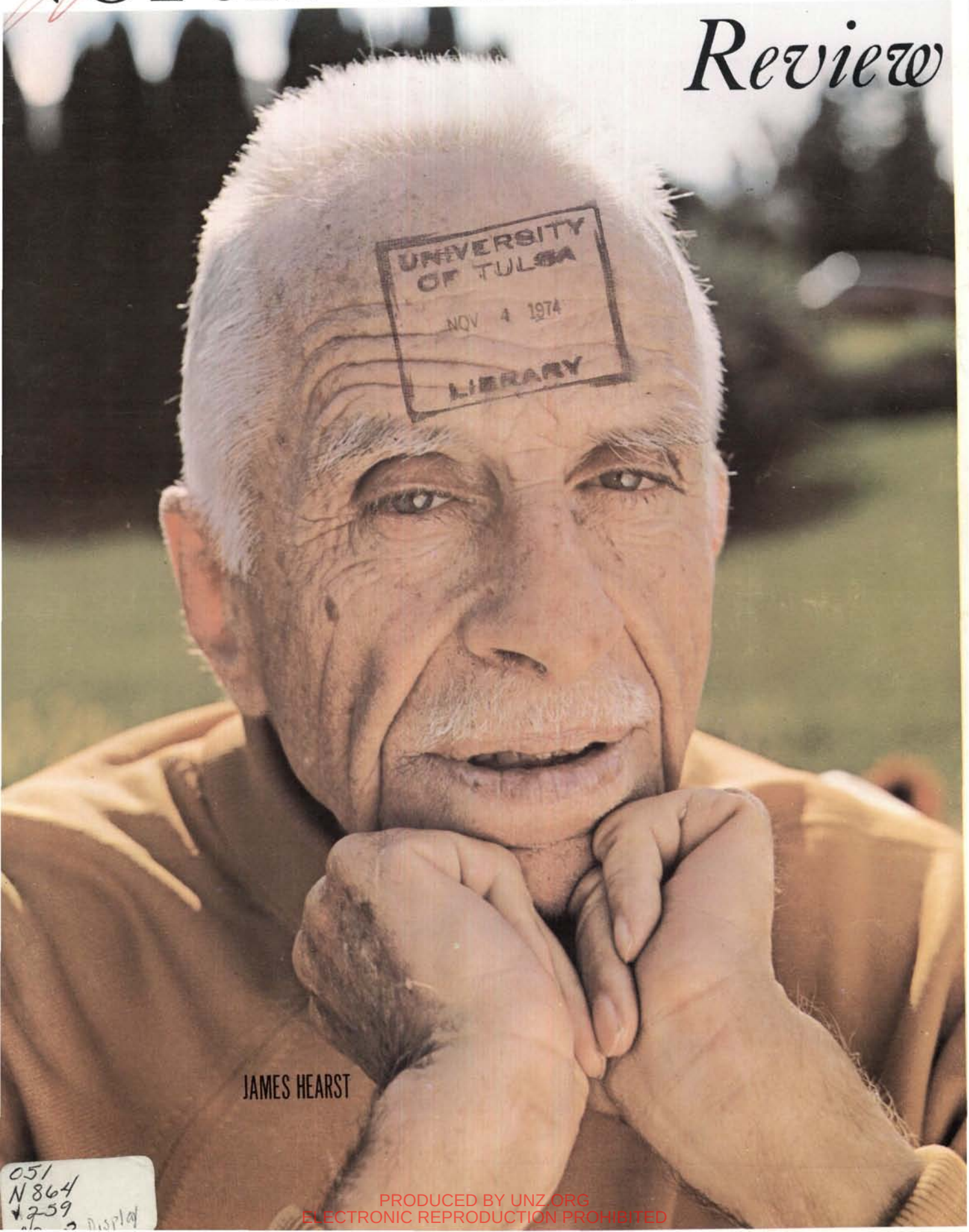
North American Review



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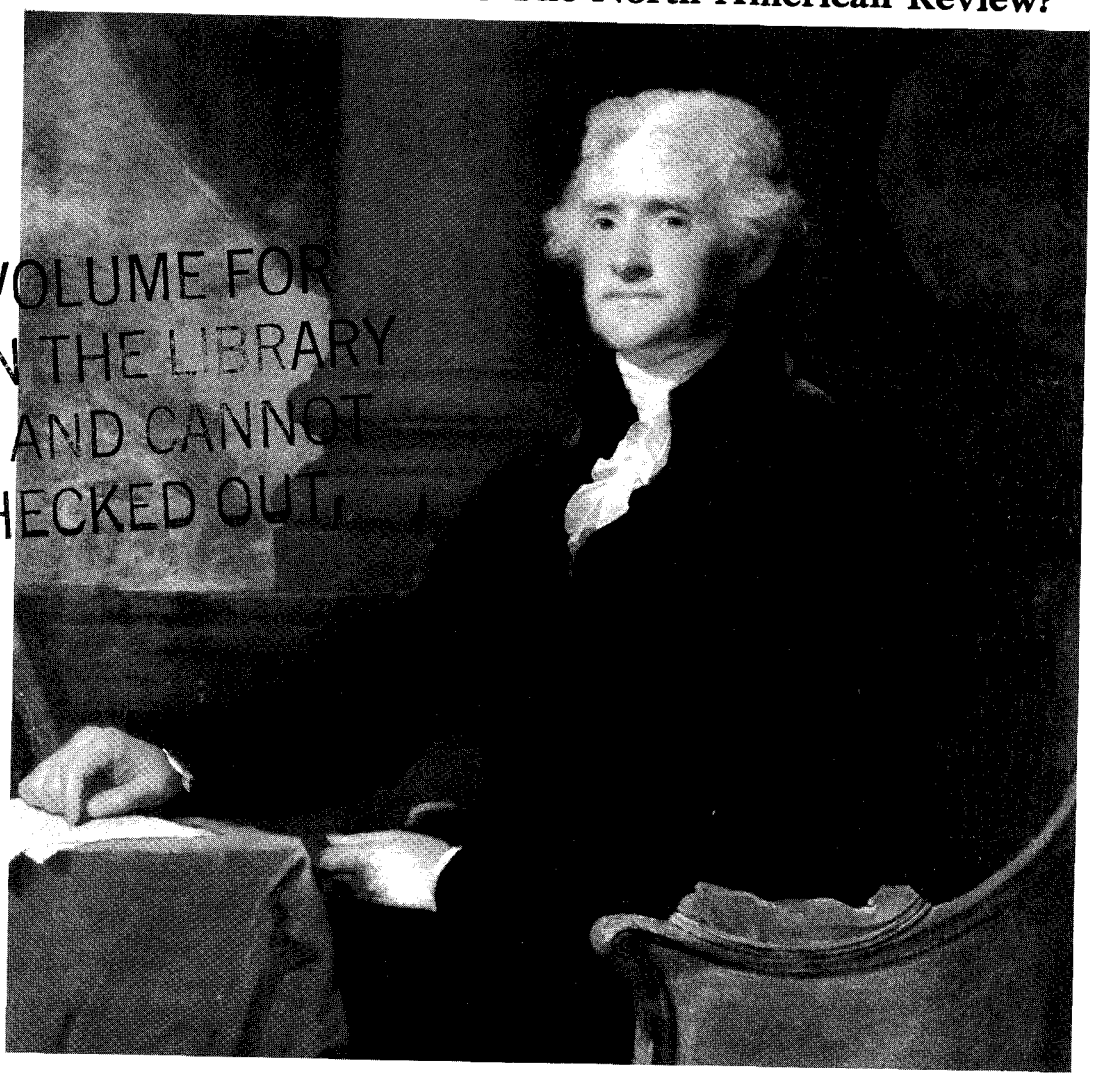

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Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

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Th: J.

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FOUNDED IN 1815
Vol. 259/No. 3/Fall 1974

The North American Review

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In his introduction to the work of Jim Hearst (below) Ken Lash remarks that "Jim . . . is no Robert Frost, farming a farm for poems." True. And hurrah. In a day when a kind of poetic isolationism is boring us all to death with its skillful irrelevance, Jim's poems are a delight; they take their vitality from a real earth, a real labor, a real sweating and hurting. And the man is likewise a delight. Take a good long look at the face on the cover; it's a face in its mid-seventies, handsome with common sense, patience and endurance, a shrewd grasp of humor and the absurd—and a gift for pretended innocence that has made more than one poker player fold his second-best hand with an unpoetical expletive.

The NAR is grateful to Jim, and to his wife, Meryl, for letting us ransack their scrapbooks, take up their time, and otherwise get in the way of their privacy for the last few months. We're further indebted to a number of Hearst enthusiasts—Maxine Thorson, Bill and Betty Reninger, Paul Engle, David Bluhm, Diane Young, Kenneth Lash especially, and a whole passel of friends and admirers identified on page 50—who together have constituted a kind of proper fan club, prodding and encouraging in the putting-together of this issue. It's been quite a party.

A note to Constant Readers: Scribners has recently published *The Comedy of Survival*, subtitled *Studies in Literary Ecology*, by Joseph W. Meeker. Joe has been the NAR's Environment Editor for the last couple of years—hopefully will long remain so—and a considerable portion of *Comedy* first appeared in our pages. We commend the book to you—and *re*commend it as well.

JAMES HEARST: AN INTRODUCTION

The reason for this "James Hearst issue" of NAR—as it is certain to be called—is to celebrate a strong, honest body of poetry produced over some fifty years . . . and to take advantage of the fact that the poet, not just a committee of survivors, can attend the party for his poems.

I first met Jim Hearst in 1968 at Aspen, Colorado, where I had come to be guest instructor in prose at a summer arts-workshop where Mr. Hearst was teaching poetry. "He's a sort of midwest Robert Frost," another instructor said, "from Iowa." *Oh, hell,* I thought—*corn. I'm going to hate his stuff, and what will I tell him?* It took me a week to get up the courage to look at some of his work. I bought *A Single Focus* and opened it. In one minute a deep sigh of relief began to surge. In five minutes I was saying "Wow" (a popular critical term at the time). When I finished the small volume a warm, unshakeable admiration was in me.

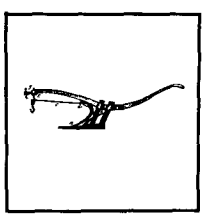
Jim Hearst is no Robert Frost, farming a farm for poems. He farmed for crops and to stay alive, and has that kind of relationship with nature. Which puts him outside the Wordsworth romantical strain, though I think Wordsworth more than Frost was trying to do what Jim does: write such a picture of the common objects and actions of nature that they become identified without being named—made recognizable not as idea but as a feeling about aspects of nature that was there somewhere inside us, now projected as image with stunning clarity.

Jim catches things by the tail just as they're flashing by. And lets us see. It is not always pleasant, what he catches (*he* didn't put it there), but he lets us see it, either way. Hands it over, actually, then goes back to work. Hard work. The softness is in the generosity.

James Hearst is, yes, a midwestern poet. I'm not sure what that is, except as it defines itself in his work. I suppose it's a uniqueness that seems to stem more from place than person. But that *seeming* is a result of choice, of someone saying *I'm more important as part of something than as someone apart.* That choice is not popular in individualist society. And so we miss out, are deprived by the poets who cannot be of us. It's nobody's fault. But it's everybody's gain when a poet *can* be of us and still be a first-rate poet. Quite an achievement, when you consider *us.* An incredible job of work when you consider *him.*

— Kenneth Lash

Kenneth Lash is guest editor of this issue's tribute to James Hearst.



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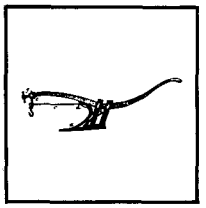

Barry Targan

The Aesthetics of Ascetics:

or, The Art of Suffering Less

Time was, when a man went into the Wilderness he did it in high style and then some. He might very well, for instance, travel up overnight from New York City to a fifty-room birch pole lodge on the crisp shores of Blue Mountain Lake in the Adirondacks in his own mahogany-paneled, silver-appointed private railroad car. (In fact, in the 1880s it would have been difficult for him to get to Blue Mountain Lake any other way.) After the trip up, and a night or two in the lodge getting adjusted to the air and altitude, he might move on into the higher and deeper woods with a retinue of servants, guides, foods, and tenting paraphernalia befitting a Bedouin prince. Indeed, one such nabob, William West Durant, faced with the prospect of having to walk 1300 feet along the impassable rapids linking the Marion River and Utowana Lake, built a railroad around the rapids instead—the world's shortest narrow gauge. Portages were not his style, regardless of who was carrying the baggage, and paddling a canoe wasn't what he came to the Adirondacks for either: At the end of the tiny railroad, in a channel deepened at a cost of $200,000, a naphtha-fueled, steam-powered launch, hauled piece by piece over the mountains, waited to chug him and his party across the lake to the old log cabin. Cabin?

Not much later than Durant's railroad, when roads and automobiles were just beginning their onslaught on the Wilderness, Henry Ford and Thomas Edison and Harvey Firestone and other friends used to drive back into Nature to stay for a week or so. Sometimes they even went to visit old John Burroughs, the great naturalist, still alive then and observant in the Catskills. You may have seen pictures of them, dressed as for a late afternoon business meeting right up to the collars, stylish neckties, and proper hats. In those pictures, behind the principals, you can also see a not-so-small scurrying army of pinched-faced, haggard, unshaven, and unidentified men. These, of course, are the wood choppers and fire builders and pack carriers and cooks and bakers and tent pitchers and whatever else was considered necessary to converting some clearing in the woods into a Home away from Home—for that, finally, is what it was all about: the re-establishment wherever they went of an existence they already understood and approved of and could control.

It never occurred to these first campers that it could be otherwise—that pleasure could be found in conditions other than those they left for a time—and pleasure was, after all, something about which they fancied they knew a thing or two. Defining it was one of the main responsibilities their caste had assumed for society. If J. P. Morgan could create and race (have others race, that is) the incredible J boats (120 feet long, a crew of 30), or if the new rich Vanderbilts could build a beach shack like the Breakers in Newport, or if Diamond Jim Brady could turn placid and horsey little Saratoga Springs into the American equivalent of Baden-Baden, then certainly Teddy Roosevelt and half the turn-of-the-century Harvard faculty could make living in the Adirondacks an experience not too distant from the Eighteenth Century *fête galant* tradition reflected in the lush and dreamy paintings of Watteau and Boucher and even Fragonard. The men in the Adirondack version were more *manly* than the French lute player, with guns and fishing rods and axes at the ready, but at the heart of it was the same old Platonic Ideal that pleasure, wherever experienced and in whatever earthly form, was a universal constant: that pleasure in the North Woods or in the Tuileries or in Heaven meant a warm, dry, soft bed at night, a decent wine with the trout cooked on a proper stove even if all 125 cast-iron pounds of it had to be hauled up the side of a waterfall.

To be sure, the trout—or some of it—was caught by the Lord of the woodcrafted Manor after he was paddled or rowed to the unfailingly fish-productive rock or ledge or undercut bank by a knowledgeable guide in an Adirondack Guide boat. These fine regional boats were thin and light and as balanced as an egg shell so that the guide could more easily carry it along with all the rest of the duffle while leading his employer to his angler's triumph.

"There! Cast there, Mr. Roosevelt, just this side of that swirl!" his guide would suggest. And behold: a fierce and challenging two pound brook trout would take Roosevelt's fly as if on order—and on the payroll along with the rest.

Meanwhile, five miles back at the home camp, other workers were unglamorously catching the rest of the fish the chieftains would feast upon that night, hauling them out of the river with rough, inelegant expertise, snagging them from the clear water with a quick upward thrust, like harpooning. No time for sport or sentiment here. When supper was to be ready, it had better be ready. Terrains might change, and latitudes, but not the schedule or appetite of the prince.

* * *

Little of this is overstated. In 1900,

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and as late as World War I, the only people who chose to go camping were those who could afford it, and they were not many. It was an expensive proposition on all counts. Besides the equipment, the transportation, the servants, there was overridingly the matter of time as equated with distance: few could manage to leave their work for the extended periods needed to go anywhere, least of all to nearly inaccessible woods and mountains. The forty-hour week, the three-day weekend, the two-week vacation, the well-marked and finely-groomed trails, the seventy-mile-an-hour Northways were all decades in the future.

And America was still too close to its immediate pioneer history to see anything pleasurable about living in a tent in the woods. Much of the nation in 1900 lived in nearly approximate conditions anyway—in sod-roofed trenches in Nebraska, in adobe hogans in the far southwest, in unchinked yellow pine cabins in Georgia—and fished and hunted out of graver necessities than the gentlemen adventurers of the Adirondacks could imagine. And the thousands and thousands of immigrants who had been pouring into the nation, even if they could have imagined or afforded a vacation, would have been appalled at the idea of spending it eating food around an open fire, of using a shakily built privy, of washing in cold water, of chasing away black bears, and so on. For most, a Sunday walk by the sea at Coney Island was as close back to nature as they cared to get. Camping—and its related activities—was a limitedly available sport or recreation, a dalliance of the wealthy outfitted by Abercrombie & Fitch, provisioned by S. S. Pierce, and played by rules supportive of their Essentialistic concepts of pleasure as a precisely definable, once-and-for-all, wholly knowable thing. (The present-day extension of that philosophical position of the old rich is expressed by the family camper who trails his house along after him into the woods, relinquishing nothing that pleased him in his old and more permanent place: cold drinks, electric lights, inner-spring box mattresses, five-course meals, the family dog, even TV; it's all right behind him. Home is where the four-burner stove and the flush toilet is. And much the same is true of any of our other pursuits of pleasure today: everything else about them may have changed over the years, but not the goal of comfort.)

Given the enormous promise of upward social and economic mobility that generates the energy of a democratic society, particularly as it has characterized the past fifty years of American history, the progression from the exclusive, wooded fiefdom of one of Capitalism's early barons to the convenient state-supported campground is predictable. Inevitable. For it is a cultural axiom that every class, regardless of economic power, emulates the class immediately above it in its swim up into the golden light of possession and regard. The Pontiac owner wants a Cadillac next, not a Rolls-Royce; one goes to mink before chinchilla, to Miami before Majorca: we camp by the hundreds today, where once one man owned all that he could see.

But where the process of social and recreational ascension used to take generations (if not centuries)—from Irish immigrant to Boston mayor to Ambassador to England to President of the United States—in our own hyper-transient era any social process moves at the same pace as all other social processes in life: our patterns of recreational pursuits change as quickly as do the means we accept to attain any of our other goals. We do whatever we need to in order to get whatever we want. Or, put another way, we don't expect to wait for anything to develop—not the knowledge of the things we want, not the power we need to get what we want. There is no longer any hesitancy that might prevent or slow down our movement into whatever sphere of experience our fancy lights upon. No activity today would occur to us as inappropriate because of our economic or ethnic or racial background.

But if we are all, from top to bottom on some social scale, involved in scrambling the rhythms and paces by which we formerly existed, yet the direction of the *desire* is constant: we still seek to do what the "best" people do, and the way they do it—only now more quickly. Because it took the Kennedys a hundred years to get from South Boston to Hyannis Port is no reason it should take us that long. We know what we are aiming at, and what it will be like when we get it.

What it will be like for most is *comfortable*, a place in the actual sun. By example, in 1948 skiing and sailing were sports as distant from the commonweal as polo is now, and they were arduous and relatively dangerous sports. But in well under twenty-five years both skiing and sailing have become widely accepted as family sports; the large potential market of the upwardly bounding has shifted the interest of equipment manufacturers and resort developers away from the elegant few to the soon-to-be elegant many; the fabled and exotic names like St. Moritz and Edgarstown and Bar Harbor have given place to the prosaic Mt. Snow, to homey Goose Pond and the inescapable Pine Lake. What hasn't changed is the idea that pleasure has already been defined once and for all and for everybody, and that pleasure has mostly to do with maintaining and extending physical comfort.

One notices that it wasn't cross-country skiing that was practised at St. Moritz, or that caught on (until recently) in this country, but rather the exhilarating dash down the twisting Alpine trail into the Rathskeller in the lodge—with the roaring log fires and the gaiety of thick food and thicker drinks, all accented by the richly ornamental ski clothing. One could easily spend hours—days—in that ambience and glow of warmth and food and companionship, and it is not the least of numerous fine ironies that in the early 1950s some of the first of the public ski lodges were once the private winter lodges of those who, when air travel became certain, left the moiety and sought out Aspen and Vail. *Noblesse oblige.*

In sailing the picture is similar: in the midst of the booming interest in the sport, much of it going into small boat racing, the emergent sales leader is the *comfortable* boat market, the little-house-at-sea concept. The day-sailor design with its cozy cabin, the over-nighter with bunks for two, or the cramped and strained room-for-four in a twenty-one-footer with fixed

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galley and enclosed head and bulkhead-to-bulkhead indoor/outdoor carpeting—all give more the illusion than the fact of comfort, but they are indicative of what we want: a good sail, perhaps, but in pre-definable comfort at the last.

We want things to stay the way we know they are good. If we know what we like, we simply want to get what we like, regardless of the problems imposed by the surroundings. Like the wealthy of the past, we don't mind that maintaining our pleasure as a constant sometimes requires adjustments and expenses and difficulties: if it *can* be done we *want* it done. Roads in the woods, troublesome bears routed, bread and ice delivered to the tent, the Sunday paper. We want our hotel accommodations in Tangiers to be as clean and predictable as our room in a Holiday Inn in Wichita; we want the water in Taxco to be "safe"; we want our sailboat to be just as warm and dry and stable as we want our campsite on the shores of Lake George to be. If in the past the fabulously rich had regiments of servants to maintain the pleasure quotient as they had defined it elsewhere (on Fifth Avenue or Fifth Lake, the master sleeps on clean linen *every* night), then today the newly affluent (anyone who can swing a Master Charge card or the like) have Technology to do their bidding, the State to extend their Will, and their collective taxes to pay for it. For all the grandness of William West Durant building his railroad around the Marion River rapids, the fact is that the fellow on site forty-two at Eagle Point on Schroon Lake in his three-quarter ton pick-up with the cab-over, rear-extension camper pod has more pure ease-making equipment in that aluminum capsule than William West Durant could even imagine in 1904. We've come a long way, right down to catalytic heaters for the cold nights, air-conditioning for the warm days, battery-run casette tape recorders, and freeze-dried foods.

* * *

All this is what Aristotle called *Immediate Pleasure*, which he distinguished from *Mediate Pleasure*. To sum up the critical distinction between

"Lucid, humane, and soundly intelligent"

THE COMEDY OF SURVIVAL

Studies in Literary Ecology

Joseph W. Meeker

Foreword by René Dubos

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SCRIBNERS

Coming in the NAR:

William K. Woods—Our man in Ohio studies the devastations brought about by tornadoes and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Erika Thorne—Our person at the population conference in Bucharest sorts out some of the faces in the crowd.

Anthony Storr—The eminent psychotherapist, now at Oxford, discusses man's relationship with the natural world in a winter issue heavily concerned about

Rights: Human and Non-Human

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Immediate and Mediate Pleasure as they relate to us here (and to risk, of course, the loss of some interesting subtleties), Immediate Pleasure is when, say, someone gives you something which you either know you will enjoy or which you quickly discover fits your concept of enjoyment. An ice cream cone, for instance (or a martini after a hard day), provides Immediate Pleasure. Conversely, if someone is banging your head against a brick wall—or playing the hi-fi at a nerve-breaking volume—and stops, what you experience, says Aristotle, is Mediate Pleasure, the pleasure of being released from pain.

Although Mediate Pleasure clearly isn't everyone's bag, it is, quite literally (as we shall see) the bag for some. I refer to that new breed of camper, the backpacking hiker.

I don't mean that going into the woods with a pack on your back is in itself new. There have always been a small number of people professionally involved in Wilderness: the classic explorers like DeSoto and Champlain and Lewis and Clark and the fabulous John Wesley Powell, or the surveyors like young George Washington in Virginia or Verplanck Colvin in upper New York State, or the present day lumber company timber cruisers and government forest rangers. They go into the woods on business, and the hardships they meet and endure are simply something they get paid to put up with while they go about their jobs. They don't seek out the discomfort they encounter, and they sidestep it whenever possible.

There are also people like John Muir, who walked from Indianapolis to New Orleans with a plant press in one hand and a small overnight bag containing his Bible and underwear in the other. Muir also went on to a lifetime of Wilderness walking—into Yosemite, into Redwood country, into Alaska, into an experience self-defining and utterly exclusive. And there was Thoreau, who lived for a short time in a metaphor for simplicity (but not too far from Emerson's complex dining room or from his mother's cooking).

And there were painters and photographers and writers like Remington and Doran and Jackson and Gersdecker, but they, like the explorers and surveyors and fortune seekers they followed, had a function and a necessity: if you were going to paint cowboys and Indians, you had to go to them; if you were going to paint the Grand Canyon or photograph the Tetons or write about the frontier, you had to go to the mountains. The dust and the bad food and the danger simply came with the subject matter.

For today's backpacking hiker, pain—or some variant of it—is very much part of the equation. NOT because backpackers are masochistic, but because backpacking is a physical activity which has come to be played like a game; like any game, particularly a physical game, much of the point is to match oneself—*pit* oneself—against limits, to search for and push against the boundaries of the body and, ultimately, the spirit. No one can expect to do that without hurting, and the main tactic of such games is to lessen the hurt before it diminishes one's ability to push the boundaries back: the miler must pace himself lest his burning lungs fail him altogether in the last fifty yards; the weightlifter must time his total lift exactly, or else rip his dangerously tensioned muscles apart; the backpacker must accept cold or heat or thirst or fatigue or worse, but always within controlled boundaries.

Just as there have always been professional people in the Wilderness, so too have there always been simple hikers, unprepared ramblers who stroll through a woods or up a high hill for an hour or a day with only a sandwich in their pocket, perhaps only a chocolate bar. It is sweaty going after a while, and sometimes unexpectedly buggy, but the view of the lake up there is worth it, they say; or to catch the silent acres of the forest-shaded trillium in Spring is worth the blister. To be sure, such rewards and more are granted the backpacking hiker, but they are incidental to what he is centrally about: the game of Mediate Pleasure.

* * *

Any game to *be* a game must have rules, procedures, equipment, goals, and—most important of all if it is to stay a game and be played well—it must maintain at all times the moral austerity of disciplined adherence to structure. In a game, structure implies the capacity to assert the Will against any vicissitude: simply, it means to function under any circumstance as though there is always time for another play, strength to gain another yard, distance enough to catch the leader. As long as one does not give up, Time is defeated. In games, one is immortal.

The expression "Don't take it so seriously, it's only a game" is disastrous not because it diminishes the game itself, but because such an attitude totally *prevents* a game. Games, *by definition*, must be serious or cease to exist. The most profound goal of all games is not getting the higher score or conquering another; it is the personal involvement in the process of the game itself. The deepest hope is to keep the rules, to contend according to the structure, to test it and oneself within definable parameters. That is, why *playing* a game is so enjoyable, and why winning or losing *are* secondary considerations after all—for obviously any loser still takes pleasure in working toward his outcome regardless of the outcome: no one loses until he has. The contest is all, the execution of an action that is as immaculately abstract as any mathematical configuration.

In backpacking, the stipulations are, unlike public games, all personal and interior from the start. Mediate Pleasure is, along with love, the most subjective of human conditions, for no one can define or experience another's tolerance for discomfort or pain. In backpacking there are no winners, no trophies or ribbons, no records to strive against, no applause. It is a game played perfectly alone; even if others are with you on the trail, no one is with you where the game of Mediate Pleasure is really going on.

The simple procedure for the game of Mediate Pleasure is to establish the condition of suffering and then to lessen it: put yourself in a position of danger, then avoid being destroyed. Listen to the talk of those who have walked Knife Edge—the most dangerous trail in the East, from the top of Baxter Peak, Mt. Katahdin (Maine), down the Dudley Trail to

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Chimney Pond—and invariably the main excitement of their talk will be about the *terror* of stooping (no one walks upright along the Knife Edge) along a three-foot-wide rim of rock at five thousand feet, sheer drops on either side; it will be about the panicking exhaustion that builds as they go endlessly down and down the steepening and twisting Dudley as in a vortex, drowning in fatigue. With what joy they share the stories of their hurting! Certainly there was the splendor of the view and the triumph of the ascent, the lovely knowledge that Baxter Peak is the first sun-touched point in the continental United States. But it is the successful contention with disaster that matters most, that years later will be the memory which does not fade: to have walked Knife Edge and not fallen or turned back; to have come down Dudley even with legs going rubbery and out of control.

As with any game, Mediate Pleasure can be played grossly or with finesse. For many years backpacking hiking was played grossly; huge amounts of suffering were accepted as unavoidable and unalterable concomitants. You slept in a couple of rolled blankets under an unscreened tarp, you carried heavy canned food or ate quickly rancid slab bacon or pemican (which was worse), you dragged a nearly useless hatchet or a five-pound axe along with a hardware store of clanking implements and a sheath knife big and heavy enough to skin a bear. And you carried it all in a back-bruising and -breaking frameless, sagging rucksack—all forty or fifty or even sixty pounds of it. You used a bizarre Indian legend formula for insect repellent that didn't work. You clumped along like a dray horse shod in hobnailed boots. The constant coldness, dampness, hunger, and soreness were features as fixed as the unkept trail itself. Needless to say, backpacking didn't have an attractive reputation—not, it is important to emphasize, because of the implicit painfulness of the activity, but because of the *imaginative limitedness* of the game. There just weren't sufficiently variable margins to make the game interesting. Mediate Pleasure is not just a matter of overcoming adversity—it is a matter of doing it with style. Today the barbar-

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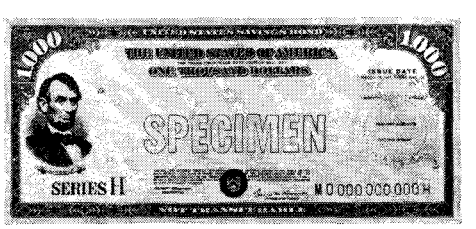

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ous conditions and limitations of backpacking are all gone; the game has begun anew.

Various factors are affecting this change in the imaginative content of the game—new sympathetic attitudes toward Nature which draw people into a direct contact with it; the increased availability of and access to well-tended public land; complex socio-economic attitudes rejecting the pleasure-dome complex of earlier generations. But the main impact upon backpacking hiking has been the introduction of exotic and sophisticated equipment which, even as it enlarges and extends the backpacking possibilities for danger and discomfort, at the same time increases geometrically the means for lessening both: larger amounts of suffering can now be more effectively diminished. The game is enlarged imaginatively *at both ends*. In the days of the sixty-pound rucksack and heavy army surplus gear, for instance, no one short of the suicidal considered facing a week of continuous trailing. Nowadays, backpacking for less than three days hardly counts as more than an overnighter, and trips of a week or more—much more—are fairly commonplace, are casually attempted. Packs today can be gotten down to thirty pounds and, in a group of hikers where certain equipment is shared (one stove, one set of pots, and so on), down to twenty. Aluminum and magnesium alloys for pack frames and cooking utensils and poles, ultra-light but ultra-strong polyurethanes and nylons and dacrons for tents and clothing and pack sacks, down or polyester sleeping bags, high temperature miniaturized propane stoves, vibram-soled boots, high energy dehydrated and freeze-dried foods, wonder drugs and prescription pain killers—the list and refining variations on it grow daily.

The permutations of choice in equipment and supplies necessary to meet the exigencies of any given trail in any part of the country in any season or climate are literally astronomical. And creating the ultimate "stone" (the fond name for the self-sustaining, all-inclusive pack) is an intellectural extension of the backpacking game that has imaginative blandishments of its own—so much so that it has fathered a growing group of *theoretical* hikers, many of whom have never so much as ventured into the neighborhood park, never mind up Mt. Marcy. Armchair hikers, like armchair generals and armchair quarterbacks, abstractly contend with gradient factors of terrain, logistical necessities, weather, strategies of ascent: *e.g.*, How many calories does a 175-pound man need to carry a twenty-five-pound pack from Indian Head up Mt. Colvin across to and through Panther Gorge and out to Tahawus in four days if it is raining in the Fall and if he uses a tent instead of the lean-to . . . but you get the idea.

The skillful and artistic backpacking hiker, of course, works out his stipulated conditions in more immediate, realistic, and broader figures. If he carries no food on a trip (or no tent or no extra clothing) he will receive first pain and then, possibly, destruction. If he does carry food, the result will be less pain and threat, but more weight and thus a new pain and a new threat thereby. How *little* food, then, does he carry against how much pain? That is it exactly. The whole point of the game: How little can you get by on? How much can you do without?

Any genuine backpacking hiker reading this is probably enraged by the perhaps morbid cast through which I seem to view his game. I am sorry I can't give him an inch or an ounce on my theory that the central experience of backpacking hiking is an ascetic one—of great subjective delicacy to be sure, but ascetic none the less. As Charles Warner, a backpacking hiker out of the Nineteenth Century put it when talking about his own adventures in the mountains, "The pleasure of such an ascent consists not so much in positive enjoyment, as in the delight the mind experiences in tyrannizing over the body." He might well have been speaking for all ascetic pursuits from the beginning of time. But I gladly grant that there are additional *kinds* of pleasure to be had by the backpacking hiker—not pleasures ancillary to Mediate Pleasure, perhaps, but pleasures nevertheless and worth having. I think of the positive pleasure of diving naked into a sun-warmed but still cooling trout pond high up a mountain, the elation of it; the pleasure of quietness *unknowable* to those bound to sea level; the pleasure of the view that makes us understand more about the little size of life and its fragility. The alpine flora, the surprising bird this high, the dazed moth blown up to this solitude—all of that. And there is the knowledge of one's specialness, the rare joy of unchallenged and undisputed earned uniqueness—for to be alone in an endeavor is perhaps the grandest joy of all, what some men saw in mythic terms as paradise. And to be in paradise alone? If for nothing else, backpacking would be worth it: to stand on the edge of the world.

But for better or worse (though no judgement is necessary), that is *not* all nor the only motivation, nor the main one. First and last, there is the game of it—the game of Mediate Pleasure.

* * *

A year or so ago, half-way up to the peak of Mt. Marcy in a particularly muddy late Spring, I crossed trails with a group of three girls—about seventeen, I'd guess. They were barefoot, slogging through snow melt and mud over sharp erosion-exposed stones, over the thick and thin tripping tangle of roots wholly indifferent to their feet. The packs they carried were enormous—if not heavy (though I suspect very heavy), then certainly bulky, a bulge of something or other threatening to find its freedom at every jounce. I could not dream what quantities of what substances they bore. The last girl had tied onto her howdah of a pack, wrapped in clear polyethylene, a guitar. A *guitar*! Half-way up and rising to Mt. Marcy's peak. On top of everything, a guitar! And she was singing as she panted by, but loud and clear.

Was she an Immediate or a Mediate seeker after pleasure? Was she, like the trailer camper far below and away, carrying her detail-laden, pleasure-loaded home on her back, a distant descendant of both the masters and slaves who tramped the Adirondacks a century ago? Or was she carrying her Mediate "stone," defining for herself and out of herself the conditions she would live by or suffer by? Perhaps she was slouching her way to the summit to be reborn I cannot tell. But imagine the pleasure of putting *that* load down!" □

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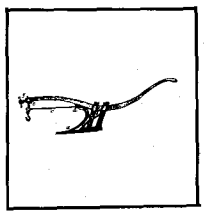

. . . another man's poison

Kenneth Lash

Women's Lib

Dept. of Considerable Alas:

"[Americans] should remember that a Chinese teacher is no more an intellectual than a professor in Iowa . . ."

—Genevieve Antoine-Dariaux,
French authoress and traveler,
Family Weekly, July 28, 1974.

* * *

Women's Lib is irritating. So unceasingly irritating, to so many people of all sexes, that one has to wonder why.

For one thing, it isn't overtly violent, therefore irritation is a possible degree of reaction. I mean, you didn't get irritated at the Black Panthers. You got furious, or scared. The women don't come at you with shotguns (which as a radical movement is their ultimate strength). But they come at you, doggedly. Bitchily. And men feel uneasy about it, without fully understanding their reaction; and many women resent it, because they do not like to be told that they are not free.

The threat to the male image—false and essentially corrupt as that image may be—is clear, as it is to the image of "the little lady"—briskly efficient and bossy (protective) in the house, fragile and lovely in the mind, softly seated on a clean, well-lit pedestal. So the Women's Lib movement is overturning idols. All radical movements do. And I believe that if this one didn't consist of *women*, and if the white American male had the same feeling of fear and guilt about women that he has about blacks, some hair-do's would have been cracked by now. I expect he's sorely tempted to crack some—just as some of the women are sorely tempted to be crackees. But he doesn't and he can't really—not without at the same time cracking the image of his male self and of his relation to women. (Only heels hit women, and as for being *afraid* of them . . . Ha!) So, since he can't oppose these women the best and almost only way he knows—by force—he must fall back on the uneasy smile, the hand-wave of dismissal—*i.e.*, the pretense that Women's Lib isn't really serious, that it will, like a gallstone, pass. But meanwhile it is immensely irritating.

And many of the visible people in Women's Lib are irritating *per se*,

without any help from anybody. All movements attract the adolescent, the kook, the psychic crook. Frustrates find a haven in movements. As do the mental stutterers, people for whom the obvious is a revelation if only pronounced in a deep voice. And of course the opportunists, like some of the New York crowd I know, who simply use Women's Lib to advance their personal careers in everything from painting to peeling. The talk-show ladies, with their big round glasses and flat faces. These are the ones who prod women to discover sensitivities they do not in fact have, and to feel wrongs they did not in fact suffer. And urge them toward a future "freedom" at once obscene and suicidally schizophrenic.

And yet underneath all this *sturm* and drag is the clear reality that women's life must change, must expand, must claim the element of sufficient choice. There are tragedies of women's lives that are quieter than the injustices. Jim Hearst speaks in his poetry of the way farmers used their women. I knew well a woman who was a teen-age flapper. A cute daughter of a well-to-do and indulgent father, she was by all accounts a willful chick. She capped her harmless escapades by a real one—eloping down the fire escape of a boarding school with a penniless out-of-towner ten years her senior. He treated her all his life like a prized toy he had been given, including growing tired of her from time to time, abusing her, but always returning to her as his favorite, his best possession. She in turn remained arrested, constant, through two children, a depression, and some twenty years, essentially unchanged from the girl who sneaked down the steps of that fire escape.

Then suddenly at 48 he had a heart attack on the golf course at the country club and was dead three days later, leaving behind a tangled mess. She went to work for the first time in her life at the age of 39. In one of those miniature dress shops on Park Avenue in New York City, that show one dress in the window, usually a frock of classic simplicity, and never a price tag. The price is a simply classic $350. The women who patronized this particular shop were not the wealthy, but rather those nouveau-riche women

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of New York who have nothing to do, who have no inner resources or tradition, whose occasional power is to give their husbands an enema when needed, and whose daily power is to buy. They are most often women who are buying beautiful dresses they do not need in a cause that is hopeless. If you can deal with them, you can deal with anyone. Within a year that 39-year-old girl became a women; within two years she became a person. That shop belonged to friends of hers.

Have you had your milk funds today?

She did not like it, she did not like or respect most of the customers, she was ill-paid, and yet in that place she opened up, she blossomed, she grew, she strengthened until she became almost unrecognizable. She did not marry again. She worked in that shop until her death some twenty years later, and by the time she died she was a kind of small legend. Trusted, respected, deeply admired even by those women who admired so very little. Well, that woman was cheated. What would the possible patterns of her life be if she were 16 today?

There are hundreds of thousands of women who have been cheated like that. There are hundreds of thousands of men who have been cheated like that, by the jobs they have eloped with. There are millions of people who have been cheated by the poverty they have been born into, or the religions, or the armies. So the Women's Lib movement is closely related to the Black Liberation movement that came before it, to the Children's Lib that is

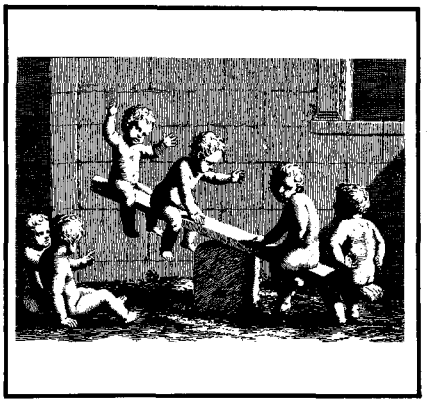
Give us this day our dairy bread.
—Japanese political prayer

coming with it, to the Old Folks Lib (Gray Panthers) that is coming along on canes and walkers . . . to the blue collar, white collar, green collar movements; the Indians, Arabs, Africans. . . These are all related because they're not at bottom differing political movements but rather similar stirrings in the consciousness of self.

In developing countries this effort for esteem—essentially psychological rather than economic—centers in the nation, the establishment and growth of its identity. In much of the western world this effort has shifted from the nation (accomplished) to the individual. The effort still takes on a guise of generality because we need group justification and group clout. Even our language demands it. But at stake is not manhood or womanhood, blackhood or whitehood. Rather, *selfhood.* The various Movements are all similar attempts to establish recognition in daily reality—not impotent philosophy—of one's own particular worth, and to gain meaningful options in relation to what one may or may not do with one's life.

The importance of Women's Lib is here . . . as is the significance of our reactions to it. One can dodge by reacting only to its dikey frills (which ought to be reacted to, hard), but the true issue is Authoritarianism.

Clearly a major conflict is shaping between the new individualism and the age-old patterns of authority. These patterns—whether in religious, political, or economic guise—have always



dealt in mass destinies. They rely on mass orthodoxy, whether truly felt or forcefully exacted. Authoritarian regimes are reversions to the childhood of civilization.

Unfortunately their innate compatibility with technologic planning gives them a modern look . . . and a potential for reincarnation. Technology is the newest form of mass destiny, and the old authoritarians are its preferred employees. The neolithic remnant (Watergate).

It's like a world battle to grow up, to be allowed to grow up. With the obvious irony that it is taking place on a field that seems to be sinking. As if an individual was struggling mightily to attain at least to adolescence, though the next stage were death. So there is great anger, and great laughter. Too much in our day is serious, literally too serious.

And that, for some of us, is very damned irritating.

* * *

Postscript: Though I distrust statistics, and detest their general merchandising as frozen truth, The Boston *Globe* says to me that "More than 57% of all women with children aged 6 to 17 worked during 1972." Assuming this to be even approximately factual, it means that by now there's a huge game preserve of kids out there fenced in by sitters, centers, teachers and other wardens. It also means a great number of women are trying to make it both as in- and out-of-the house workers in a society that has not yet provided a form to enable that kind of effort to succeed in any thoroughly satisfactory way. Not that most of them would admit it. They are busy being "free"—a word most people in this country now use to indicate any form of activity that either never

The way to an untroubled conscience is to have none.
—Mickey Mao's Little White Book.

occurred to them before, or that they never thought anyone would let them do. But my crystal quartz ball, a new model with a fifty-year range, shows me the following picture: On cranial TV ("Can be implanted by your television service man"), I see a flatfaced, neutrally-chested woman performing on a talk program, in Esperanto. Her name is Gloria Sternum. She is saying, with a great facsimile of excitement, "But it's true! It *is* possible. My husband didn't mind at all once we had talked our way through it, and seen the logic and the fairness. This is the fifth week that *he* has gone to work and *I've* stayed home. The child doesn't seem to mind, and as for me I already feel so different, so . . I don't know . . free . ." □

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JAMES HEARST

I walk around
with a map of Black Hawk County, Iowa,
in my hands.
That old chief, Black Hawk,
full of dignity and daring,
loving his land more than his life,
after his capture went to Washington, D.C.,
and said to the President of the United States:
"You are a man. I am a man."
He never lived in the County of his name.

But Jim Hearst is there,
a tough and gentle man,
tongue like a tomahawk
splitting your skull with his wit,
then easing it with a blast of bourbon.
On a clear day you can see him
plow the long fields and the lyrical English language
along the banks of the unblue Cedar River.

This farmer knows
the lines of a Black Angus steer,
the lines of a Hampshire hog,
the lines of his own nourishing poem.

With his broken back,
the tensile strength of his will,
he backs the brutal beauty
of men and women walking together
in the flaming August noon,
in the frozen December day,
in the dark light of eternity.

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JAMES HEARST

He hates self-pity
as he hates hate.

He wipes sweat from his face with a quick hand.
He caresses the yielding snow with a shaking hand.
He knows that men, women, children
are horrible and holy.

All his years he lived a double life:
in the world of the living poem,
in the world of the living pain.

He savors jokes with joy,
tasting them on his tongue
as if they were hickory-smoked
over a slow fire.

Heart of a bull,
hand of a hawk,
ear of a dog,
eye of a cat,
Jim Hearst, you old Indian,
you old bastard,

burned in the bold air above you
in Black Hawk County
are the proudest words we can speak:
Here is a man.

Let the earth be lucky.

—Paul Engle

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MONOLOGUE FOR JIM

JAMES HEARST

There's nothing like taking a watch apart, for complete wrecking of the watch. But a poem is not a watch. It can be taken apart and even if never put together again, the original is still there ticking along smooth as ever. Otherwise I wouldn't touch it.

So I'll take "Truth" [p. 19] apart, Jim, as I promised to do someday, twelve long years ago. That's about par for me in promise keeping. I said to you then that "Truth" was a perfect summary of the one and only indigenous American philosophy: pragmatism. You were surprised, never having suspected such a thing. No reason, of course, why you should for pragmatism is simply a somewhat more organized, partly more systematized, and perhaps more intellectualized version of the most typical American way of handling life.

Lines one to three, for example. What a mixture of exasperation and patience in dealing with an idealist, or helpless neighbor type, who seems to figure answers to practical problems can be had for the asking, or perhaps from idle speculation in an arm chair. You refrained from saying the rocks were in his head, and pointed out the only route to the answer. Practical action is the sole method of solving practical problems, of discovering empirical truth. This you drily stated in five words.

Perhaps you were pouring it on a bit in lines four to eight, though a teacher must be both thorough and redundant in helping the theoretical person come to grips with hard fact. It also set the stage for letting a little wordly wise touch of irony stroll into view in lines nine to eleven. Pragmatism captures the practical American's wry awareness of life's obstinate, obdurate hard-heartedness. The practical American instructs his son in this awareness, when at age five he drops his jelly bread on the floor. "Ten to one it's jelly side down," says the father without even looking. "How did you know?" comes the amazed question. "That's life," is the laconic response. So we learn early to play the percentages, if we learn at all.

Lines eleven and twelve reach the answer to the original question. It is stated pragmatically, that is, percentage wise in terms of probability. Nothing is certain in this life, not even death and its timing or taxes and their amount. The timing and the amount are the whole point, are they not? Yet the probabilities are important too. They are the sole way we can handle life if we can manage it at all.

Having given the answer, you explain it. When we explain a curious fact we teach a great deal about it, the kind of stuff eminently useful for estimating further probabilities. All this in lines twelve to fourteen, not to mention another dash of gentle irony.

Now comes the perfect phrasing of pragmatism's epistemology, its version of the truth-find process, in case we have forgotten the meaning of the bigger word. Lines fifteen and sixteen deserve to be quoted as summary in every textbook dealing with pragmatic epistemology. "The connection with a thing"—that's everything. It tells both the how and the what, the method and the result, the beginning and the end, perhaps the mountain and the mouse.

The punch line, number seventeen, punches and says it all for the pragmatist. I look back over the jumble of disconnected parts with awe. Who would have thought the hard soil of pragmatism could be plowed up, seeded, cropped and harvested in a poem? A poet of a former day seemed to think so: "cultivate your garden" he said. You did, Jim. Thank you.

—Dave Bluhm

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ROOTS OF POETRY

JAMES HEARST

Like most youngsters my delight in matching word sounds began early, while I was still making my "S's" the wrong way. But life on a large livestock farm with brothers and a sister to play with held other attractions, and the pleasure in word sounds diminished. Yet it never went away and along with a feeling for rhythm it came back in full force in the country school when I was in the eighth grade. I began to re-write the stories in our literature book in rhymed couplets, probably the worst doggerel that has ever been perpetrated upon a bewildered but encouraging teacher. It was something I did instinctively without plan or suggestion and the achievement gave me great satisfaction.

Later on, in my early twenties, I began to write with serious purpose what I called poetry. *I had read everything I could lay my hands on, from "The Lady of the Lake" to* Don Quixote *to the "Rover Boys" and nearly everything I wrote carried an echo of some older, usually Victorian, poet. Fortunately I recognized these monkey shines for what they were and I decided if I were ever to write anything of my own, I would need to find my own voice, my own style.*

I decided that America had never had a genuine farmer poet. There were poets a-plenty who touched on nature, there was even Robert Frost struggling to express his New England farm experiences. But I wouldn't have thought of Frost as a real farmer even if I had known about him then. His was a rocky, hillside, stunted kind of farming. He said when he saw our mile-long corn rows, "You've got too much land, it's all too big."

I decided to try to tell the truth about farming and about life as it is lived on a farm. I wanted to

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JAMES HEARST

look at it squarely, honestly, to keep the balance between cleaning manure out of the barn and running the cornpicker on a warm October day with the corn going one hundred and twenty-five bushels to the acre. I had been up at all hours of the day and night to act as midwife for sows, heifers with a first calf, and mares. Animals trusted me and I became an expert obstetrician. Later when my brother and I started farming together, horses went out of fashion and we learned to run the machines, tractors, automatic baler, combine, gang plows. We learned how to buy Texas and Wyoming calves and feed them out for the big city restaurants and night clubs. During the depression

we saw the sheriff sell part of our farm because we couldn't pay the taxes. We saw our neighbors sell out and move away. People died who had been our friends and neighbors. The country school disappeared and a bus took the kids to a town school.

All this was part of the life I was going to make into poems. But when I began to make the poems I discovered that poems are made of words and that transforming feeling and thoughts into words linked in rhythmic patterns was a craft, an art, that required persistence and devotion and never came to an end.

I felt that American life had a red thread running through it, the red thread of rebellion, and I wanted to weave that into my poetry. We have never been a docile, subservient people—farmers least of all. We fired the shot at Concord heard 'round the world. We had a Jefferson who wrote the Bill of Rights, a Tom Paine who said, "Tyranny like hell is not easily conquered." What made the United States unique was its faith in people, instead of traditions, or kings or high ranking ecclesiastics. Walt Whitman summed it up for me by saying, "How dare you place anything before a man!" This is a courageous belief and one that has been dangerous to systems of slavery and exploitation. It opposed Calvinism by believing that every individual should be given the opportunity for growth and development, and that most people were fundamentally good. It was a faith that said the common man shall inherit the earth, not the chosen few, the elect. This spirit and faith like an electric current has lighted the lamps of human decency and progress along the avenues of our national life.

To an innocent and inexperienced farm boy this was heady stuff and I believed it—I still do with some reservations. But it did not tell me how to write poetry.

But I found help. My English teacher in college, W. B. Fagan, said, Jim, write what you know. Leave Beauty, Truth and Duty to people who don't know an abstraction from a horse turd. And I read in the preface to John Synge's little book of poems, "Men cease to build beautiful churches when they have lost happiness in building shops." I learned more about poetry from Synge than from any other poet. I translated him to say, there is no poetry that does not have strong roots among the worms and clay.

But I still had not learned how to write poetry and perhaps I shall never stop learning. To paraphrase T. S. Eliot, I had not yet learned how a poem says a new thing and the way it says it is the only way in which it could be said. So I set out to learn and I read every book of prosody and poetic technique I could lay my hands on. I read Sir Philip Sidney, Sidney Lanier, Harriet Monroe, William Carlos Williams. I read Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell on the Imagist movement and its theory. I picked up hints from articles and book reviews, from biographies and interviews. Some of the statements bewildered me, as when E. M. Forster said, I drop a bucket into my subconscious and draw up all kinds of queer fish. One day an older, established poet told me, the way a carpenter learns to saw a board straight is by sawing boards. So I laid aside the books on technique and went to work.

I began to notice resemblances and parallels between the world I lived with and the world I lived in. As a spring sun or autumn frost makes a change, so the imagination makes a change when it focuses on some experience in which it is willing to engage itself. It does not blow the last trump for squash vines as frost does, nor open the first crocus with the spring sun, but it does for the moment fix in its imperishable amber some truth, insight, revelation, or prophetic recognition of human experience. And sometimes it spreads—to quote Rupert Brooke—a shining radiance over the landscape of its subject matter. There is a stay, an arrest of the ebb and flow of human tide where the imagination has selected, arranged, combined and re-created a shape or form of its own choosing which gives up some inkling of the meaning and mystery of existence.

I began to dig in my own field and see what kind of a crop I could raise. I heard rumors of projective poetry, concrete poetry, and "found" poems. But none of these seeds grew for me. I began to be conscious of style and imagery. I found it better to say, the sun came out like a drawn sword, than that the morning sun was rising. And I also—and this was a great discovery—

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learned to shun such romantic apostrophes as Shelley's, "Hail to thee, blythe spirit." I set myself the discipline of good, clear, and simple writing. Style is not an ornament, a garnish laid on to make a dull bouquet seem fresh. It is nondetachable from the writing and the way to it is by orderliness, honesty, and simplicity. Writing is slow, lonely, and difficult work and there is no substitute for the discipline that creates distinction in the written word.

Most of us also learned by imitating other writers. Robert Louis Stevenson said that for years he played the sedulous ape to established writers. But eventually one comes to one's own kind of writing. I learned to write to some purpose, to have direction toward a goal which would help govern the choice I made of words and images. It is easy enough to find your way around your own township, much more difficult to find out where you are going in the land of an imagined country. Another discovery I made was that what I wrote was not written in cement, that it could be changed, revised, crossed out, that there were alternative lines that often were better than the first ones. And I found that some poems are born bad and deformed and no amount of repair will improve them and better throw them in the waste basket than waste my time on them.

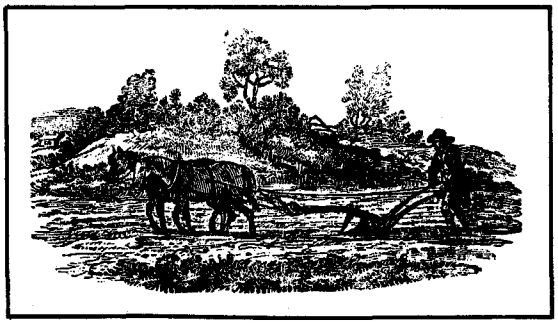
Tone, like style—or perhaps it is part of style—helps express the attitude of the writer. It is part of the answer to the question of how do you see your world, from what vantage point do you look at the landscape of your time and its inhabitants? I tried to use a flat mid-west tone, the tone of the language I heard around me, the tone my people used. It shows much of a writer's attitudes, bias, prejudices, and spirit. The writer reveals himself through language.

Our world becomes known to us through our experiences. And experience comes to us through our senses. It makes an immediate perceptive impact on our sensory apparatus and finally on our nervous system, and from this sense data our mind gets busy and finds meanings and makes rules and oh, all sorts of syntheses.

This experience is immediate; it comes right now, at this instant, not after some theory or formula or proposition. It is not evidence of meaning until the poem makes it so. We re-create or transform the experience into language, into images that express the experience in a new way, an original way of seeing. We see a tree in autumn with its splendid color and say we ache with beauty. But first we see the tree, note the colors, hear the leaves rustle, feel the frost, and then make our exclamation. My wife looked out the window where a full moon shone on the fallen poplar leaves and she said they looked like shavings of silver. It is with this kind of imagery that the poem presents life to us so that we seem to see, hear, smell, feel, and touch experience. It is through imagery that we say the poem comes alive. We use generalizations and abstractions in editorials and textbooks. But the poet speaks to the specific experience and in his own kind of language as if it (the experience) had never been expressed before.

It seems to me that over the thousands of years of our existence, the basic experiences of the human family have changed very little. We are still moved and threatened or saved by joy, sorrow, suffering, love, death, time, and place. There are many more. We share these experiences vicariously and come out safe and sound and self-righteous as a pumpkin. There is no experience that cannot be

JAMES HEARST



used as the raw material of poetry. We cannot hide the junk heaps and amputations of our inner lives, no matter how we console ourselves with the daily slogans that try to make us believe we live in a comfortable, responsible world.

Most of us need meaning and order in our lives. It is the poet who shows us the meaning of meaninglessness, the absurdity of the absurd. For through the structure of the poem which gives shape to its material, we find the clue to its meaning.

I have tried to do this in my poems. I have tried to arrange a pattern of words to express what the poem says. Sometimes the underside of life appears with its ugliness, betrayals, and disillusion. The poem struggles with the truth of these experiences too and if it cannot resolve forces into some kind of peace and harmony, it can define and identify them.

The poet uses all the technical devices he knows to bring his poem into its completeness. He must understand, feel, and hear. He has a sharpened ear for the singing quality of meter, for the rhythmic measures of free verse. And always he searches for the right word, for the original image, the new and exciting rhythm. The gospel of St. John begins, "In the beginning was the Word." So with the poet who with his technical skill and creative energy, uses language in the special way that is poetry.

The muse of poetry is a cantakerous mistress. She is never satisfied with the second rate, the imitation, the easy way out. Nothing but hard grinding application in the cause of original expression ever admits you to her presence. Art, as Flaubert said, is long patience.

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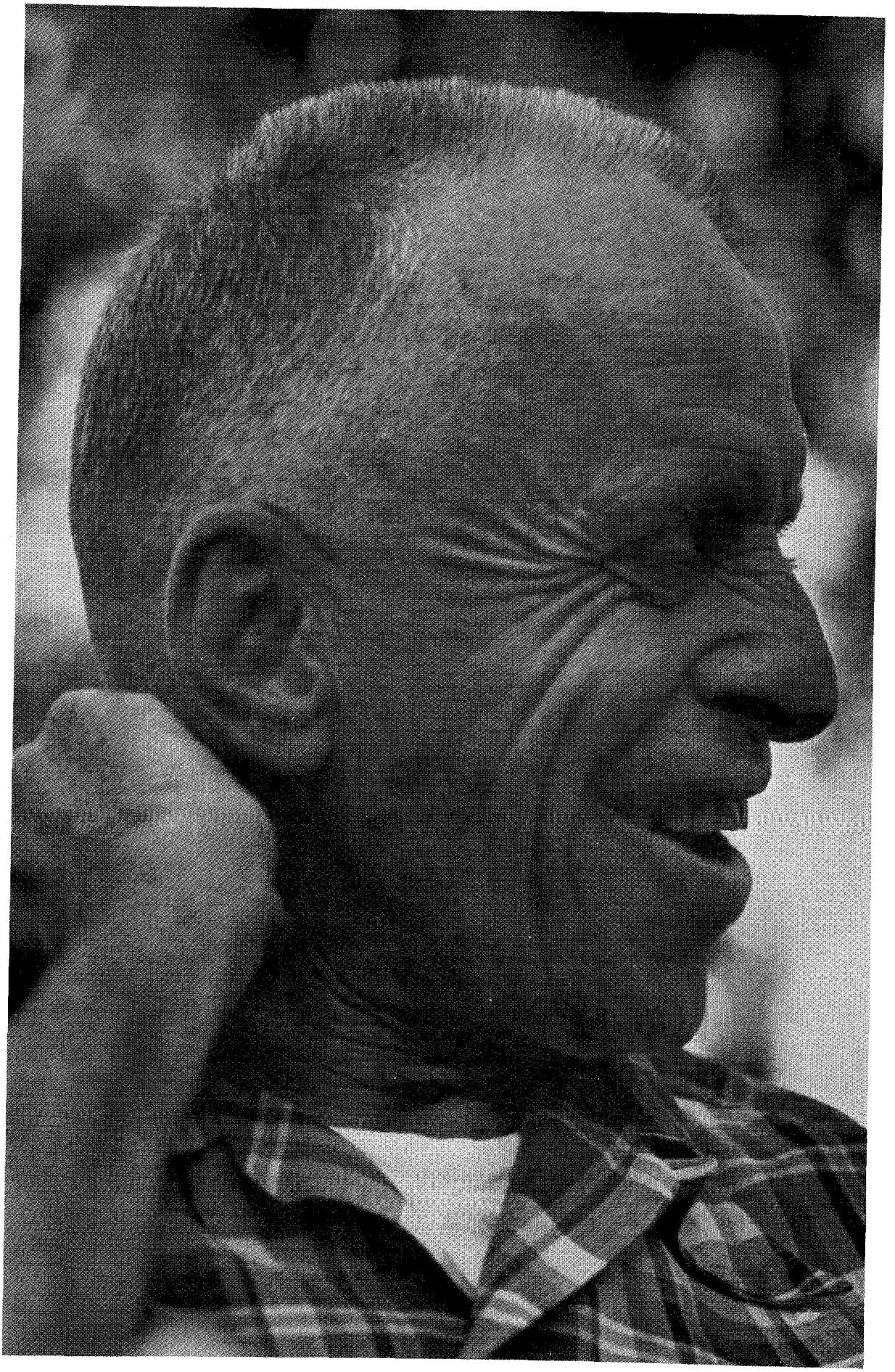
JAMES
HEARST



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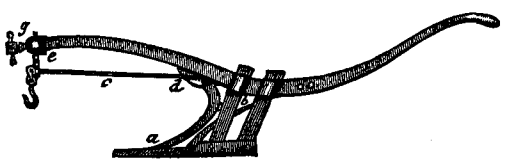
POETRY

JAMES HEARST

TRUTH

How the devil do I know
if there are rocks in your field,
plow it and find out.
If the plow strikes something
harder than earth, the point
shatters at a sudden blow
and the tractor jerks sidewise
and dumps you off the seat—
because the spring hitch
isn't set to trip quickly enough
and it never is—probably
you hit a rock. That means
the glacier emptied his pocket
in your field as well as mine,
but the connection with a thing
is the only truth that I know of,
so plow it.



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TO AN OLD SOW

JAMES HEARST

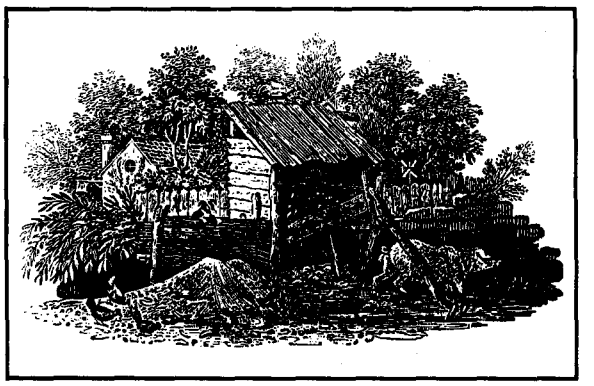
Whoa there, you crazy sow, where do you think you're going?
Charging through the garden like the devil's on your tail,
Did I forget to lock the gate or did you force the latches?
Some day I'll skin you for your hide and hang it on a nail.

Hey, quit dodging back there, sniffing the air for mischief,
Turn around, behave yourself, get back into your pen.
Don't stop to smell the daffodils or cultivate the roses,
You've rooted up the pansy bed to prove you're loose again.

Let me catch my breath now before you test me further,
Easy . . easy . . that's a girl, walk right through that gate . .
Let me offer you a hand so we won't take all morning,
As if I'd nothing else to do but pass the time and wait.

At times I see in you, old sow, ways like mine too clearly,
You won't jump to attention when someone blows his horn
As if he ran the township—don't chomp your jaws at me!
The Lord had trouble with nature the day when you were born.

Look . . it's almost twelve o'clock, quit your crazy fooling,
Move . . or take what's coming, I'm ready to throw the switch,
Come on, you've raised enough hell, let's have peace and order,
Come on, this is my last word, you big black slippery bitch.



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PLEA FOR SINGLE FOCUS

JAMES HEARST

You saw double today when you said you saw the wind
riffle the tree tops while the waters lay still—
there's always a child playing house or going up in a swing,
and an old man, lame or blind, going down hill.

Though the sun invades the summer burning with pollen,
the dark nights of winter lie heavy like flesh in pain,
there's always a picnic with a full moon on the river,
there's always hay to be made before the rain.

A farmer plants apple trees, his young son watches
from the stump of an old one cut down by an ax or time,
lilies bloom sweet in their beds before they fester,
bells describe weddings or funerals by their chime.

A man lifts walls of a new house set on a hillside,
sows grass to hide a raw grave with its feathery touch,
on a rickety porch in the valley a small helpless woman
rocks slowly finds even that effort almost too much.

Oh, see with now's round-eyed appeal, hold and cherish
love's warm hands like wheat grains at harvest, sweet apples and red,
remember how water dissolves the dry desert's rancor,
that a vision turns stones of fact to miraculous bread.

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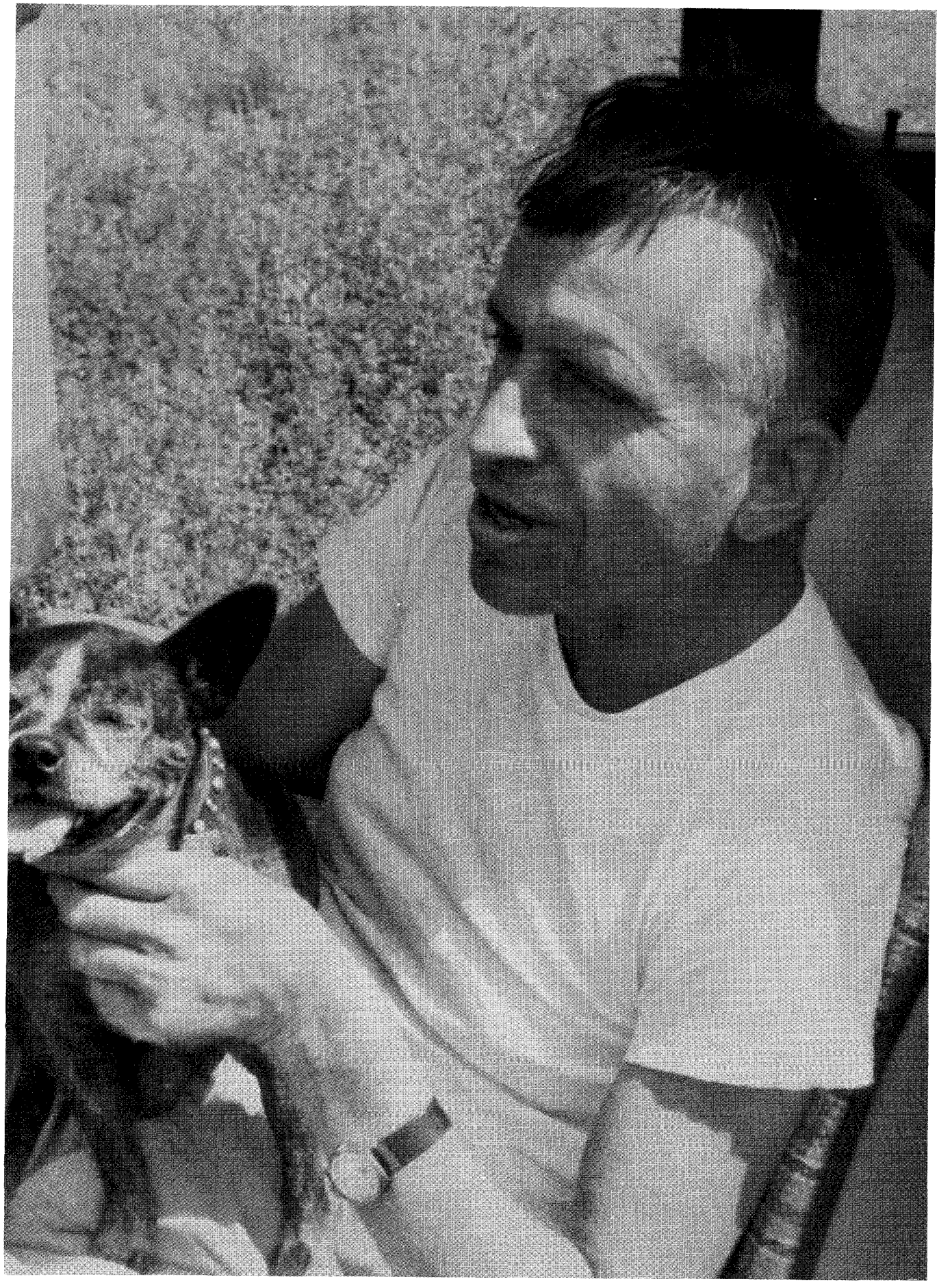

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JAMES
HEARST

THE OLD DOG

The old dog waits patiently for death
like a flower waiting to be folded into a seedpod,
curtains of age hang over his eyes
yet he starts a rabbit
or warns the fugitive sow
with the fury and joy of an image
created now only in memory.
He has lived a life of loyalty and obedience
to the authority from which his own derived
with a few minor lapses
and tried to keep his world
as orderly and well guarded as possible.
Now he seeks a corner that invites
the warm March sun
and with a cornmeal muffin between his paws
asks no description of the kingdom
he will inherit.

COWS BAWL ON SUNDAY

The image of God
in a warm mackinaw and rubber boots
daily fights his way into the steaming barnyard
into a multitude of hungry, angry, playful and determined animals
through a cloud of raging sound
to bring order out of chaos.
Six times a week and rests not on the seventh–
and there fails his divinity.

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THE QUESTIONER

JAMES HEARST

When evening bows its head so does the farmer,
I have seen him do it, haggard with sweat and fatigue
As he limps his way home to the daily chores,
I have been the man myself.

I have come to the lane that leads off toward the barns
And leaves the fields, and the streams of growing,
If one can think of earth as a moving tide
Where the flow is vertical.

I have stopped at the gates where maples lean on my shoulder
As confidential friends with nothing to say,
Staying to keep me company while the sunset
Squats on a burning hill.

Is this really the way it looks or is it seeming,
A distortion of the eye to fool the heart,
Collector of imitations, but still believing
It does not beat for nothing?

This is what I ask myself, is there a ledger
That adds this work and sweat to my account?
I know I do not fill my barns with dreaming,
But what's the accounting for?

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WHAT SHALL WE DO?

JAMES HEARST

It is really a small matter,
hardly worth official notice,
but a citizen of our village
walks his own path.

He has been know to uphold a friend
behind his back;
He has been known to mention the death
of an old tree;
He has been known to handle facts
without gloves;
He has been known to cancel the debt
of a mortgaged boy;
He has been known to enjoy walking
against the wind;
He has been known to feed crows
in a hungry winter;
He has been known to sit in the sun
on a working day.

What shall we do with this man,
would he be safe on a committee?
Even our children beg
to follow him.

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JAMES
HEARST

REFLECTION

I think I shall decide to stay
Here in a field with a fence around;
Sowing some wheat, making some hay
And learning the ways of a piece of ground.

There will be time to watch the birds
Perch on the sky, a wavering shelf,
While I am thinking important words
To say to men who are like myself.

I shall have this to recall when green
Seasons are grey and days are thin:
The infinite wonders that I have seen,
And the curious person I have been.

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JAMES HEARST

LIMITED VIEW

The clutter and ruck of the stubble publish the time
That prompts my steps, I know what I have to do
For my bread before frost locks the land against
My hand, and fire shoulders the chimney flue.

Rocks have a word that crows repeat over and over
On the cold slopes of winter where the picking is poor,
It echoes in empty granaries and I learn by heart
To say in the hard days to come, endure, endure.

But now I straddle the field and break its back
In the vise of my plow, while a thresh of weather streams by
Sweeping up clouds and birds, leaves, banners of smoke;
I gouge out furrows, a starved wind ransacks the sky.

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LITTLE BULL

JAMES HEARST

The . . poor . . little . . bull
behind the gate calls to
cows knee deep in clover,
the wind smells of cows in clover,
the sun stains his back with
sweat where flies gather,
he bangs the gate, barbed wire
sinks its teeth into his hide
and he bleeds, down in the dust
he kneels and bawls red-eyed,
furious, his groin aches and swells,
the steel sings in its muscle,
he's just a little black bull
butting his horns against the
damnedest bull-tight gate
you ever saw.

STOLID FARMER TO HIS SON

Choose your wife for straight legs and an honest tongue.
Take to market no more than you have to sell.
Be cautious with strangers and cover the top of your well
And teach your children virtue while they are young.
And when you are old be glad if you've learned to keep
Your wife's affection and memories of neighbors and friends
And had the sense to know that your comfort depends
On the money you saved and the grief you have put to sleep.

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THE NEW CALF

In the basement by the furnace lies
a new born calf I found, chilled and wet,
in the barn this morning, its mother
a wild-eyed young heifer frantic in
the pain of her first birth didn't
lick it off to dry its hair and kicked
it in the gutter when it tried to suck.
I picked it up, rubbed it down and
fed it from a bottle. Here it lies
in a basket lined with straw while
I watch its heart tremble, flanks quiver,
muzzle twitch, eyes flicker. It sucked
so feebly on my finger I had to spoon
the milk (mixed with a little brandy)
in its mouth and stroke its throat
to make it swallow. Now it waits for life
to decide whether to go or stay—and
I think of deserted innocence everywhere,
a child locked out of the house,
a woman dirtied in love,
a father betrayed by his son, all of us
sometime abandoned, lonely, denied.

MEN GIVE MORE THAN PROMISES

JAMES HEARST

You'd let me walk barefoot on
broken glass while you wore shoes,
you'd wring the necks of baby birds,
if the mother bird was watching,
to show how strong your muscle is,
I might have died and if I had
you'd have bought paper flowers and
thought you showed off big, you in a
new suit and straight face just long
enough to get me stuck away. Boy, when
you said, "You got yourself in this, now
work it out," I knew how much you cared.
I'd like to get you in a trap that
closed a little tighter every day
and watch you gnaw the bars, I'd take
you to that phony doc who cuts your
heart out while he springs you free,
and let you hobble down the street so
bugged with shame you hope the garbage
truck will pick you up—don't come near
me, snowing me with them words, you don't
love me, I'm just a doll, rag one at
that to play with. I'll nail my door
so tight death can't get in if you
come around again.

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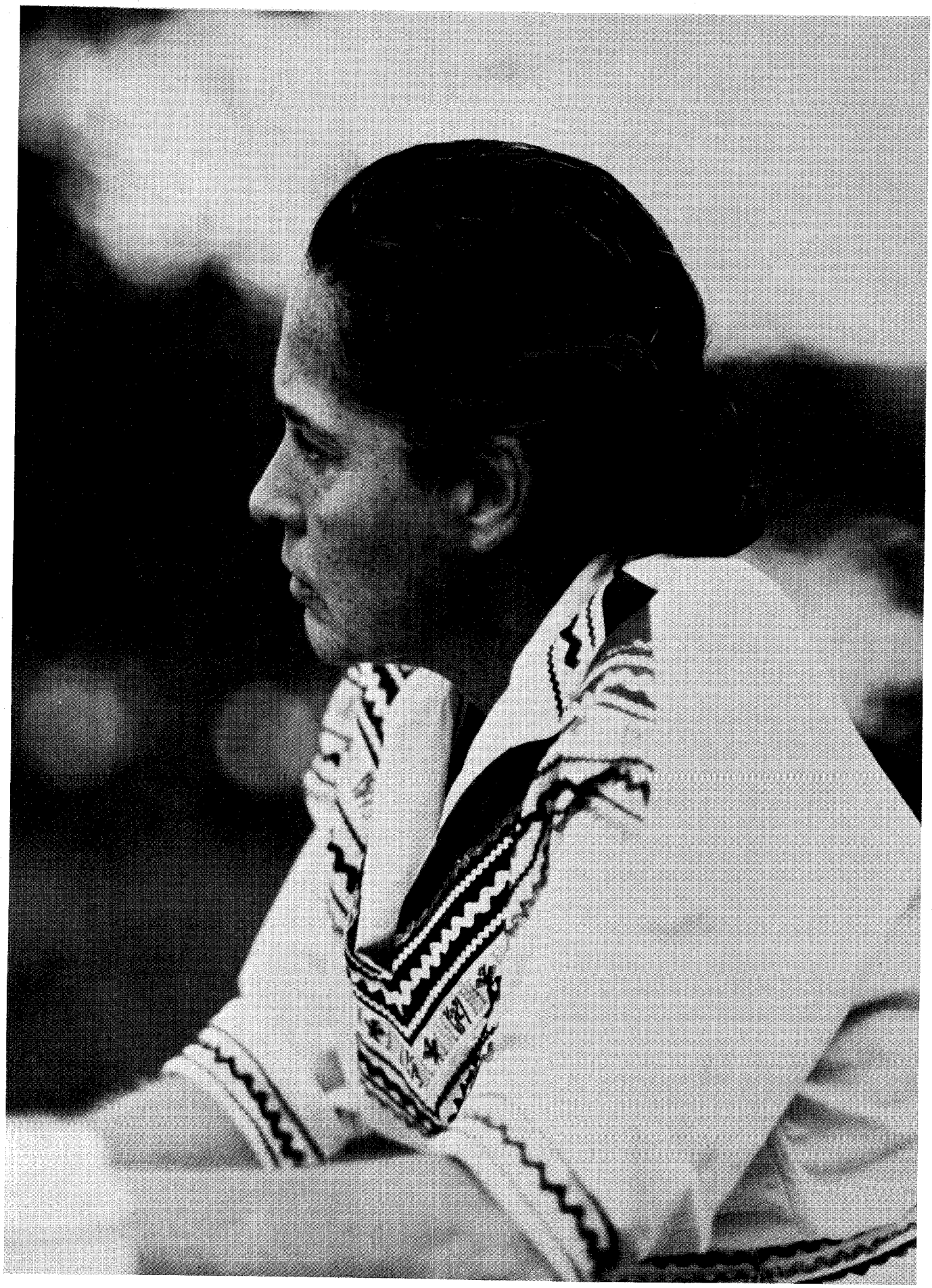

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JAMES
HEARST

FORSYTHIA

You said, take a few dry
sticks, cut the ends slantwise
to let in water, stick them
in the old silver cup on the
dresser in the spare room and
wait for the touch of Easter.
But a cold wave protected the
snow, and the sap's pulse beat
so low underground I felt no
answer in myself except silence.
You said, winter breaks out in
flowers for the faithful and
today when I opened the door
the dry sticks spoke in little
yellow stars and I thought
of you.

MARRED

This headache of a morning
is split wide open with birdsong,
such yipping and piping
and shrill whistling from the lawn,
the cardinal gloats in the elm's top
and drives his sharp treble
like a nail into my ear drums.
And the sun bursts unannounced
into my bedroom, squats on the floor
in a yellow uniform and stares
at my eyes until they hurt.
Show me a door I can back out of
in my sullen clothes and come back in
dressed as I should be to delight
my wife's wide eyes this summer morning.

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THE YOUNG OLD-TIMER

JAMES HEARST

His hands seek each other under his overall bib,
his back arching against convenient corners,
but his eyes raise the question
and his throat repeats it—
why is it that nothing is the same?

Nobody worked so hard then and they had enough too
and the crick's smaller than it used to be and
the ground ain't so rich.

We can't raise crops like they did,
and dust storms and floods, desert's creeping east,
no snow in winter, no thunder and lightning in June,
why is it like this?

Mildly he presses his quarrel with the times
at every meeting, at every corner-gathered group,
his anxious face sniffs
the wind of destiny and in his ears
the loudly rising storm of doom roars down
like the horn of Gabriel blown from his own barn ridge.

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THE HAMMER AND THE RAT

JAMES HEARST

The teetering carpenter sets his spike
and draws back his hammer cocked to strike
when he sees a rat poke out under the shed
so he aims the hammer at the rat instead.
But the rat draws back so he turns again
to wallop the nail on the studding when
the rat unabashed slides his whole body out
and the carpenter quick does a right-face-about
on the weaving ladder to get a good aim
with his poised hammer but spoiling the game
the rat ducks back in his hole and the nail
waits for the hammer still raised like a flail.
Released from the angle the carpenter veers
back toward the nail as the rat reappears
and freezes the movement he had just begun.
Here is the oldest play under the sun
the nail never driven, the rat never dead
because two ideas are in the man's head
opposed to each other but hopelessly wed.
The carpenter may be there twisting yet
though by this time no doubt the ladder has let
him fall from dilemma down into the mud—
O pray that at last he fell into the mud.

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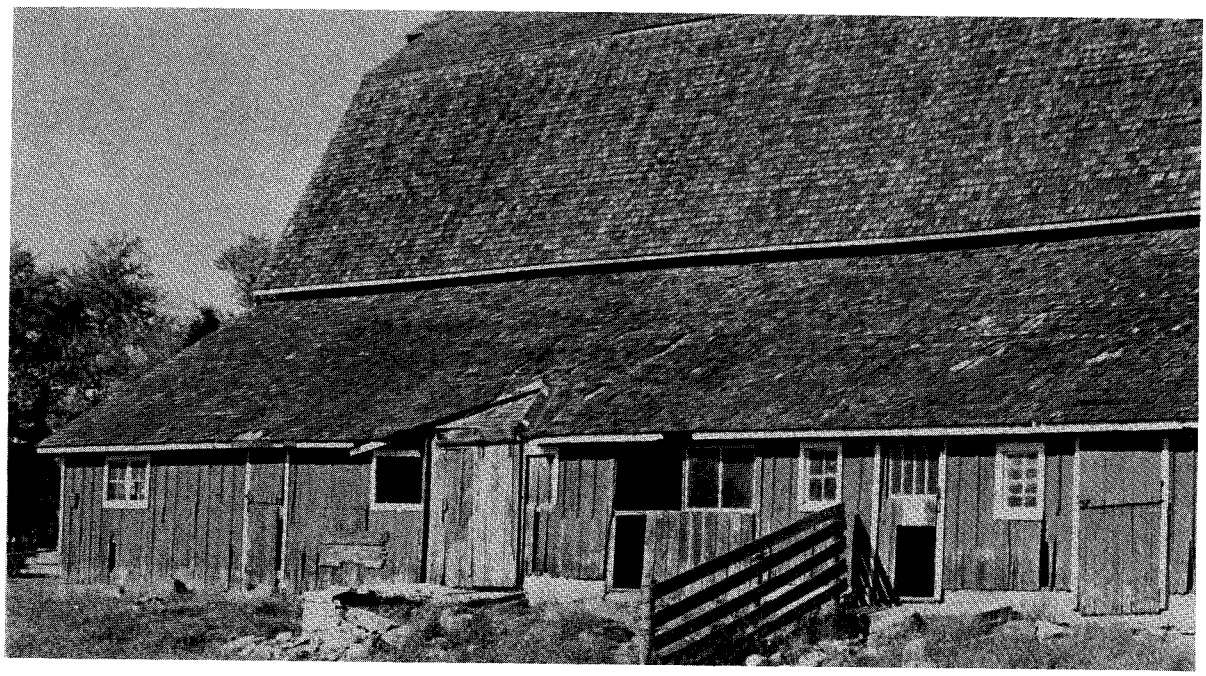
JAMES HEARST



THE FARMER'S SEASON

Yeah, spring, I know spring, the vernal season,
the chores of birth bathed with lilac's perfume,
but the lily's gilt rubs off for the farmer's son
who keeps night-time vigils with mud and rain
and cold. Lord, what a way to inherit the earth,
aren't there other paths to life and the fullness
thereof? All this pain and blood and struggle
for a new start, all this sweat and moan to bring
forth, all this care, to clean nostrils and
let in air, to dry the body and warm the blood,
to teach wobbly legs to stand, the mouth to suck.
Here I am alone at midnight with the rain
for music, a bale of hay for my bed, a lantern
for light, and for company an old sow with
a basket of pigs in her belly ready to deliver.

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JAMES
HEARST

APPLE HARVEST

The wind knocks on my door,
I must pick my apples now
or let them rot.
The wind straddles my back,
I set the ladder carefully
lest more than apples fall.
Someday the tree will die
and with stalks and men, towers,
birds and fruit seek earth's
level. We support our shapes
while our strength lasts. I store
the barrels inside the shed
and with my thoughts I watch
the clouds, gray membrane of wind
across the eye's vision.

TIME LIKE A HAND

The hardware merchant reaches back for the past
through the young girl's body
on a lonely road known as lovers' lane,

while the relentless hand of time at his back
pushes him down the street of middle age
where the picnic fires go out
and the green banks fade.
Where he is trapped behind the counter
with his washing machines
and annual conventions,

to watch the fat jovial days
vanish in the mirror of a grey skinned man
dressed in old promises.

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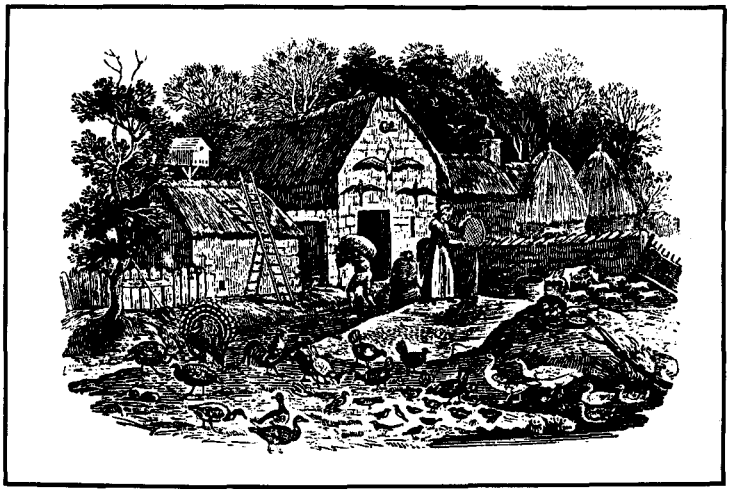
MANY HENS DO NOT MAKE LIGHT WORK

JAMES HEARST

The drake has too many hens
and he knows it.
They squat meekly
supplicating favors
with sleepy eyes
and soft necks.
He bows loyally many times
and shakes his tail
up and down like a
salt sifter to put himself
in the mood. But, alas,
he treads the warm
willing backs with
every hope of achievement
but his promise wavers
and he falls back,
waddling off like a man
late for a committee meeting.



She was a higglety, pigglety hen,
one wing askew, tail ragged,
stranger to the rooster,
under a board pile
she nested a clutch of eggs
that decay ripened.
She fought off rats and crows,
comb bloody, eyes blazing,
feathers loose on her basket of bones—
a daft old woman
snug in a wasted corner.

THE WASTED CORNER

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JAMES
HEARST

LOGICIAN

Pete Eversen was called four-eyed Pete
because he wore glasses
but he saw duty plain nevertheless.
When he found the hired man with his wife
he shot her instead
because help was hard to get
and anyway whose fault was it?

FREE MAN

Hans Karen and debt were old friends until 1932
when he and his banker had insomnia
for the same reason.
Both now sleep sound
for no one will trust Hans
and since he did not shoot himself
he lives out mild unharrassed days
and dreamless nights.

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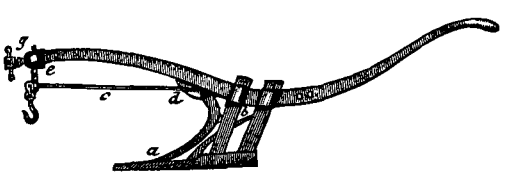
JAMES HEARST

THE REASON FOR STARS

I never wonder a lot about stars.
I'm much too busy with things of this earth
That show when a season of labor is done
Just what the labor's been worth.

Stars are all right to admire like flowers,
I like to see pretty things when I'm done
Working in fields, but what do I care
Whether a star is a stone?

There's plenty to learn in the ways of a seed.
What do you get if you study the sky?
I'm greater for holding one fruit in my hand
Than a heaven of stars in my eye.



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REMINISCENCES

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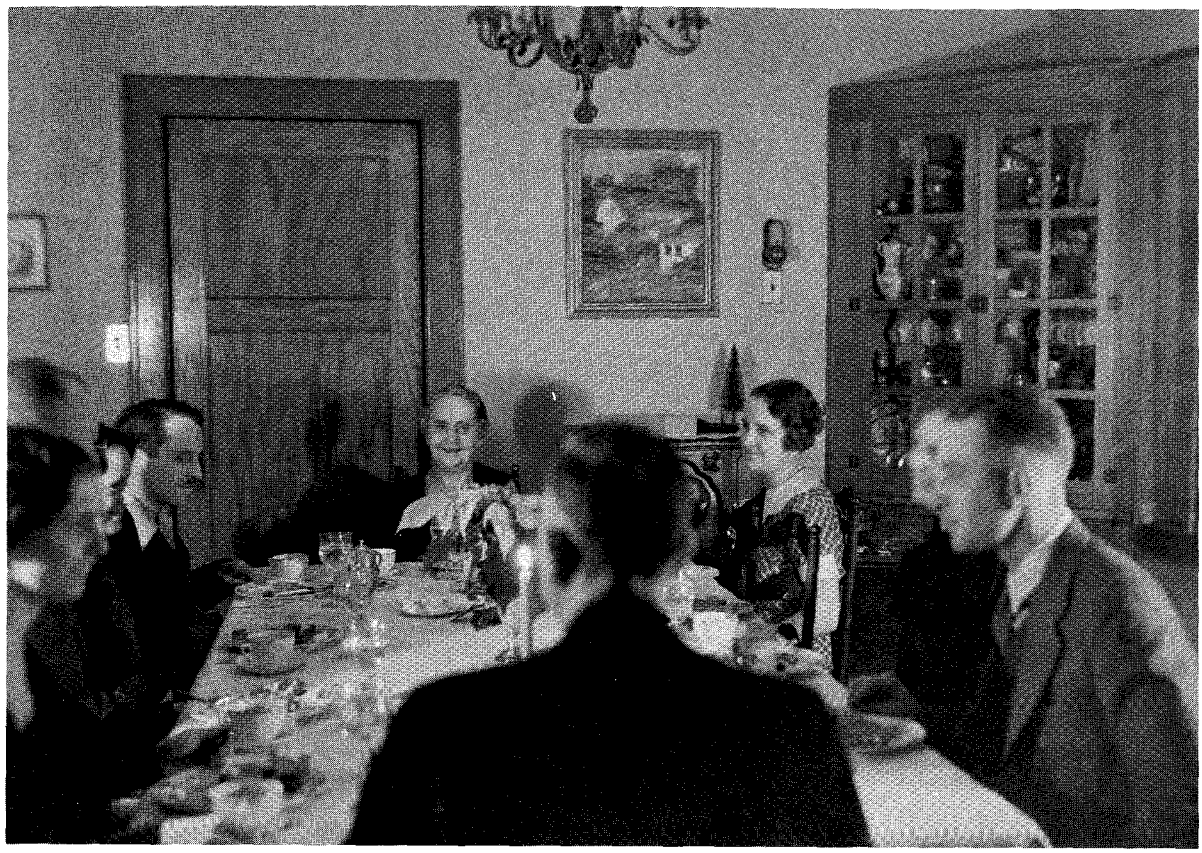

We had a big family, kind of close-knit. Lots of cousins coming out to the farm. We went to country school. Like most kids, lots of chores to do. Farm kids. Walked a mile and a half to school. Pretty cold in winter, sometimes. My sister and brother and I would form a kind of wind-break for my brother Charles, who was the little one, and he'd fall in behind us. A kind of happy childhood without really knowing it. We had ponies and played horse polo with croquet mallets. We all rode horseback—no bicycles out on the farm. Some of the pupils at the school were 20 and 21 year old men—they wore suits with watch chains across their vests, and I was scared stiff of them—25 or 30 pupils in the school, later dwindling down to about 15. We all shared in the work and whatever trouble there was and all the fun, and so we were pretty close.

We were read to a lot as children by my mother, who was gentler and more affectionate than my father—he cared for us a lot but he wasn't a very demonstrative man. I could read before I went to school. Mother thought that we should have some kind of feeling and affection for books. Sometimes she'd read us Grimm's fairy tales in German. Quite often we were poor. We didn't know we were poor, because we always had plenty to eat, like farmers do, and we had enough to wear. We weren't poverty-stricken, but we just didn't have any money. But we always had books and we always had magazines. I didn't know how we got them. We got some as presents, but we got them somehow. Mother had three sisters who always sent us books for presents at Christmas. We weren't given toys for Christmas; we were given clothes, things we needed. We made our own playthings and there was no problem about it. Sometimes we'd get on our horses and ride down to the river and go

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fishing. Or we'd put up a wigwam in the big grove of maples, grown from seeds that Grandfather brought from Ohio on his way out. It was always dim and twilit in there, a mysterious kind of place, and we played there and sometimes we slept out there and camped there.

Aside from a dictionary, the school didn't have any books. At home I gobbled books up. I'd get off into a corner somewhere and just lose myself in Sir Walter Scott or any of those books that were around there and that were making a world for me that I really loved to be in. By the time I was 12 years old I could drive six horses on a gang plow and did.

We'd leave our lunch boxes at school out in the hallway and sometimes in winter they'd freeze. All the food in them

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would be frozen. All the kids in school except us were Danish. Cedar Falls used to be called by some people "Little Denmark" because there were so many Danish people here. A national Danish paper was published in Cedar Falls.

We made whistles out of willow sticks. We made bows and arrows. We got pails full of sap from those maple trees and hauled them in for Mother to boil and make candy and syrup.

It was on a March day and there had been a freezing rain, and we found a bunch of pheasants on the ground, us kids, with their eyes frozen shut, and they couldn't see to fly, so they didn't fly. We gathered them up in gunny sacks and put them down in the basement and forgot to tell Mother about it. Well, they thawed out after a while. She went down there and she came flying back up and said, "What in the world is going on in that basement! There are great big birds flying all around!"

After I got through high school I went to college after a while. It was Iowa State Teachers' College then. And I wasn't really much of a student. I liked playing baseball mostly, though even there I wasn't first class because I liked playing more than I did working hard to win. Things were different when I took work at the University of Iowa because there I only took subjects I was really interested in. And I met and worked with Professors John T. Frederick and Frank Luther Mott. John T. Frederick became a friend of mine; he encouraged me to write.

I don't know what I would have done without John T. Frederick. I was just writing by myself without anybody telling me whether it was good, bad, or indifferent, let alone what to do with it. I didn't even know enough to send it out to magazines to be printed. It never occurred to me that anybody would buy the stuff. John Frederick was then editing a magazine called *The Midland*, and eventually they published some of my work, and he gave me a list of places to send things out to. People like Mark Van Doren, MacKinlay Kantor, Ruth Suckow, Paul Engle, were publishing in *The Midland* around that time. And then one day while I was at the University Hospital—I was there for three years—Harriet Monroe came to Iowa City. John Frederick asked me if I wouldn't like to come to a luncheon for her, where I sat next to her. And she said "Send me some of your work." And it turned out I had quite a correspondence with Harriet Moore. First she wouldn't have anything to do with what I was writing; gradually she began to like it and later on she began to publish some of it in *Poetry* magazine.

I'd done some writing in college, but it didn't amount to much and I never thought much about it. It just seemed a thing to do, along with other things. But after my accident and after I'd been in the hospital a while I began to think, *Why don't I try writing*? And so I began to write things, really just for my own sake. I'd throw most of them away. One day one of my aunts got hold of a poem I'd written and sent it to *Good Housekeeping*, and darned if they didn't buy it and pay me $35. And I thought, *Brother, there's money in those hills*. I don't think I sold another poem for two years after that. But I did learn that you could write things and sell them and I began writing verse and prose both. I wrote some short stories and published them, but I'm not really very good at short stories. I don't know why; they just don't come to me very naturally the way writing poems seems to. And there was one good thing. It turned out I wasn't bothered too much whether people took the stuff I sent them or not, whether they published it.

I know rejection slips are supposed to be pretty hard on you, but they never really have been on me. They still aren't; I don't seem to care a great deal whether the work is published or not. I do it, I work hard at it, I revise it, I look at it again—I work at it until I think it's the very best I can do. And then I'm through with it. It's on its own. It's got to go out and make it or not. But I'm through with it, I've done what I can.

I guess I have my own peculiar attitude about being published in New York. There were a couple of times there when New York publishers were kind of dickering with me, writing me about publishing a volume of my poems. And somehow I found I never quite followed through. I just didn't seem to want to be published in New York. I guess I didn't feel that my kind of stuff would sell out there, that it really had that much to do with *them*. It seemed more like work that came out of the Midwest, out of the life and the reality and the nature of the Midwest, and somehow belonged here. So finally when the time came that a book of mine was to be published, it was published here in the Midwest. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but

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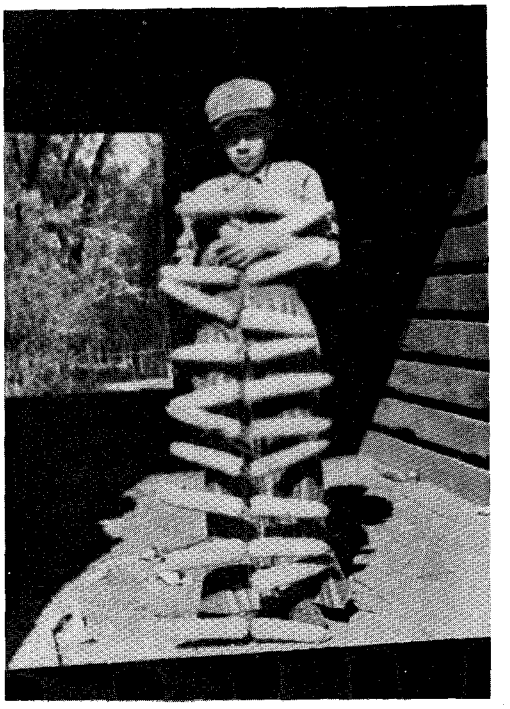
somehow a man named Carroll Coleman, who was the head of the Prairie Press, out in Muscatine, Iowa, wrote and asked me for a manuscript, and I sent it to him, and that's how I got my first book published. It went through three editions. I was about 26 at the time.

The way I did that college work at the University of Iowa while I was in the hospital is that the instructors would come over to the hospital. Some of it I'd kind of do by correspondence and then every so often somebody would come over and give me a test or we'd have a talk about it, and other times they'd come over kind of regularly, some of them recommended by John Frederick or they'd just heard about me or just did it. They were awfully good to me. I was doing some of that writing, and so forth, during those years in the hospital, but I didn't think of it as anything I was going to do once I got out. I was going to go back and go into partnership with my brother George on the farm. That was settled. That's what I was going to do, and that's what I did. I went back and I pretty soon got working on the tractor. Somebody would lift me up on it—my brother and one of the hired hands—strap me in, and I'd go to work. And I got to doing the bookkeeping for the farm and we bought another farm, and the work went on. When the corn husking was done in the Fall I went down to Iowa City for two or three months, did physical therapy. I still hate exercises worse than about anything I can think of. But the doctor was my friend and he told me to do it, and I guess I knew I had to do it and I did it. Whatever writing I did around those years I usually did in March, before spring planting started up again. I was also writing articles for magazines, like for *Wallace's Farmer*. I knew Henry, and he and some of his friends and editors asked me to write this or write that. I was asked to do a series of articles for *The Nation*, and Norman Cousins asked me to do some things for *Saturday Review*.

I'll tell you a story about Norman Cousins. He came out here to give a talk. I met him at a party afterwards and we were talking. I could see his nose was running. He was suffering from hay fever and I mentioned it to him and he said, Yeah, he'd been having a bad time with, and his doctor told him one possibility was to overexpose himself to ragweed—might build up some kind of immunity to it. I kind of looked at him and I said, "You really want to try that?" He said, Oh, yeah; yeah, he wanted to try it. I said, "All right, I'll pick you up in the morning." So I did and I took him out to our farm and took him around to where there was more ragweed than you could shake a nose at, and he went through it. Then he went back to New York and wrote me a month or two later saying he'd just got out of the hospital, I'd darn near killed him. And worse than that, he still had his hay fever.

Sigrid Undset was out here. She came out to the farm to see me, and she asked if I would broadcast some talks to the Norwegian farmers . . . during the War, a kind of underground *Voice of America* stuff. And I did it. And I know the broadcasts were picked up because I got some responses from people over there. During the War we, like everybody else, had an awful hard time getting help. I remember some of the faculty would come out from the college and help us on the farm, a couple of people in the art department, a couple in the English department, that were raised on farms and knew about the work, and they'd come out and somehow we'd get it done. But it was nip and tuck.

As for the accident and how I felt, I don't remember very much except always having hope. I guess I was a born optimist. We were going swimming and I thought there was 12 feet of water right there in the river, but there was only two, and I just went and took a big dive without looking carefully enough. It was a darn fool thing to do. And I came down with a good crack, and I thought I was done for, that this was the end of me. But the other boys saw me floating downstream and they picked me up. And then after I was in the hospital for a long time I thought, well,



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it's just one of those things and I'll have to make the best of it. And gradually, little by little, I began to recover. For a while it was pretty hard breathing; I didn't have much power. But muscles began to come back and I began to get a little better. I got so I could stand up a little. By the time I had spent two years in the hospital I was getting around a little bit. I don't think I ever looked back.

I think there's nothing in this world that's duller and harder on the spirit, or more of a flagellation of the soul, than exercise. Oh, how I hated that! Oh, how I hated it and dreaded it! I still do. I think exercise is the devil's own invention. What helped so much was the family. It was an awful good family, and they kept encouraging me and egging me on and helping me and urging, and just being there and doing what they could.

I remember at one point I decided I really ought to know something about prosody. I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know an iamb from a spondee. I got hold of every book I could lay my hands on and I read them all. And it just didn't seem to do me any good. My work didn't get any better. And I kept remembering a carpenter that said to me that the way to learn how to saw a board is to

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saw a board. So I just started writing more and working harder and trying to learn by doing it my way. I did discover, at least for myself, that Coleridge was right about writing a poem, that you somehow open up a path between your unconscious, or whatever you want to call it, and your hand, and just get out of the way. You just keep your reasoning, for instance, out of the way.

Boy, it was rough during the '20s. The stock market and everything else in the country seemed to be going up, but our prices were going down. We couldn't get those two ends to meet no matter what we did. Old Calvin Coolidge paid no attention to the farmers' distress. My father was at that time chairman of the legislative committee of the American Farm Bureau, and he went to see Herbert Hoover before he

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was president, and Hoover said, "I pulled myself up by my bootstraps; let the farmer do the same thing." I remember when the sheriff came out and sold part of our farm for taxes. And my sister Louise was teaching and my mother was making cottage cheese and this and that, and we were all just trying to hold it together. My three years in the hospital helped pile up a lot of debt, and my brother died of lymphatic psychoma when he was 23, so there were a lot of burdens added up together. But then gradually in the early '30s things began to improve for us, and we finally got out from under; once we got our feet under us again we did all right. By the end of the '30s we were all right. Thanks also to two hired men we found who stayed with us for 30 years.

In 1941, I think it was, Dr. Reninger—Bill Reninger has been a friend of mine ever since we met—came out. He was head of the English department at I.S.T.C. He came out to the farm one day and we were picking corn, I remember, and he said to me, "Jim, how about coming down to the college and meeting a class. There are some young students down there who'd like to do some writing and talk about it with you." I said, "Why, I never taught a class in my life, and I don't even have a degree." "Well," he said, "they don't so much want to be *taught*. They want to talk about writing. You don't need education courses for that." So I put on a clean shirt and went down and talked to these 12 or 15 students. And then Bill said, "How'd you like to be on the staff, and do this every week?" I thought it'd be all right, so I did. But I was sort of terror-stricken. Classes were two hours, and I figured I could say everything I knew in 15 minutes. I still do, but since I've been teaching for a long time I've learned the teacher's secret, which is to take 15 minutes worth of something to say and make it last over two hours. But somehow it went all right and I was asked to teach a second class, and then pretty soon three classes, and before I knew it I was a regular faculty member. And I couldn't do farm work, too, so I quit that. I was getting to the point where farming was getting a little hard for me anyway, sitting on the tractor all day and then off and into the wheel chair and back and forth, it was getting pretty difficult. My brother and I dissolved our partnership and he took the home farm and I took the other one and rented it out. And so I've been teaching ever since. My brother Chuck went on farming and was doing pretty well right up to a couple of years ago when finally his health wasn't what he needed and he had to give it up.

During the '30s banks were failing in Iowa, and at the same time they were foreclosing on farms; the farmers couldn't meet their payments, and it was like a kind of bankruptcy. They'd foreclose on you and everything you had—everything the farmer had—was for sale. And of course it didn't bring much of anything, but that didn't help him, because whatever it was, when it was all over he didn't have his farm, and he didn't have any money, and he didn't even have his furniture. So the farmers got together and had what they called "penny sales". When it looked like one of them was about ready to get foreclosed and go bust, he'd have one of these sales and he'd sell some of his things by auction to some of the other farmers. His neighbor would make a bid of a penny and nobody'd go higher and so he'd get whatever it was for a penny and take it off with him. And then later when it was all over, of course, he'd give it back to the fellow, so he'd at least have something. It was a neighbor sort of thing; the sheriff and a few others made some pretense of trying to stop it, but nobody really wanted to that much, and so they helped each other out in that way. So you'd maybe end up at least having a cow or two, or a few chickens and some furniture, and maybe a plow—a few things to keep you going. Once when a judge came out and tried to stop that sort of thing, the farmers showed him a rope and showed him how it would fit, and of course they didn't really hurt him but they let him know that they were going to do this, and they did it. The farmers were really aroused and they weren't in any mood for trifling.

That was a bad time, during the late '20s and '30s, when farmers were dumping milk and destroying butter and killing hogs and doing anything they could think of to try to get the prices up a little. And it wasn't just the farmers. You could go down to the John Deere Tractor Plant in Waterloo and there was just nothing happening. There was nobody on the streets. It was just still. You could *smell* poverty. "Depression" was the right word for it. We had a man who walked out to the farm three miles and back every day to work for his meals—just for his meals. It was that bad. People from towns and cities were moving back to farms if they had any in the family, because at least they could eat out there until jobs were available again. The government didn't seem to know what to do about it. It acted scared, as if all those ten million unemployed were suddenly going to become some kind of communist or

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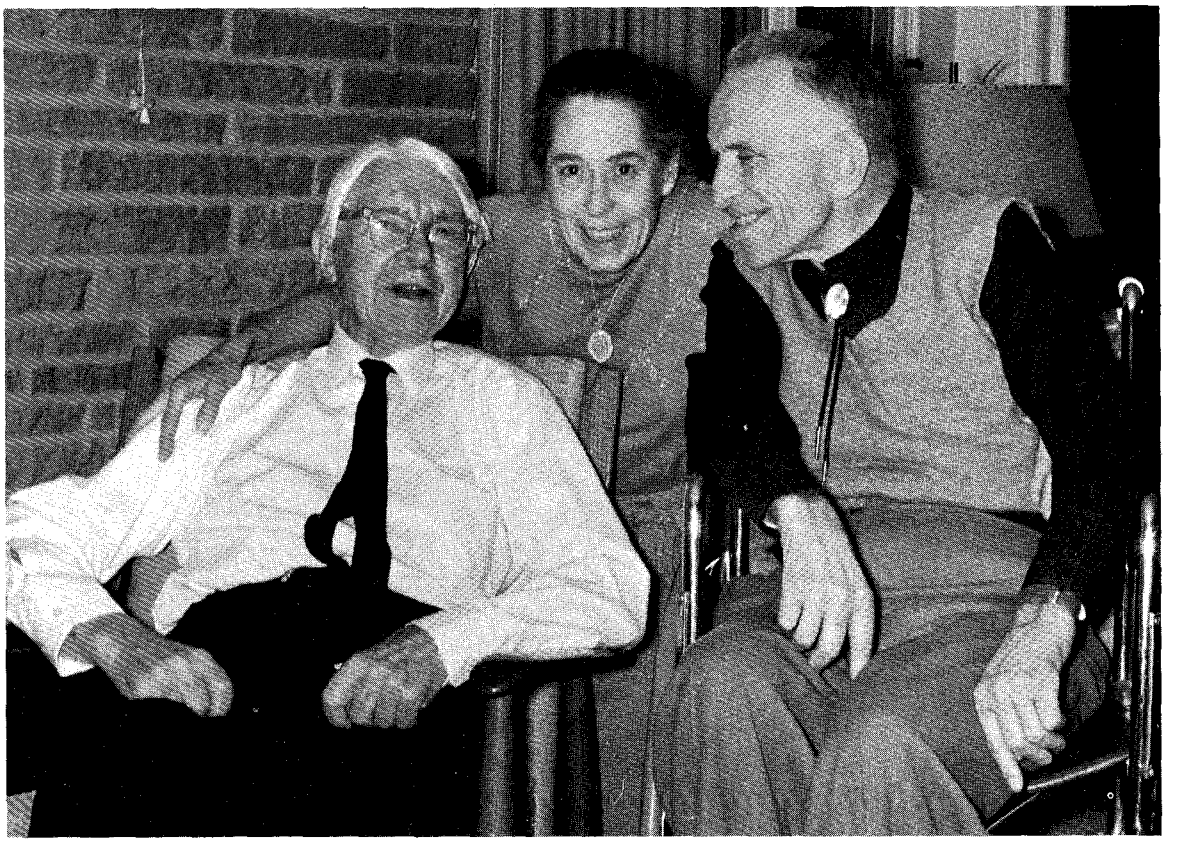
anarchist army or something.

Meanwhile, those years and after I was writing still and beginning to publish a few books. After *Country Men* I published *Sun at Noon* and *Man and His Field*. Then *A Limited View*, and then *Single Focus*. All except one of them went through at least two editions—not available anymore. Coleman at Prairie Press printed them so handsomely they kept winning prizes. Not for the poetry in them, but because they were so beautifully put together, paper and typography.

I never cared much for the literary crowd. I've been kind of wary about meeting people who write. Most of those I met and liked, I liked for other reasons than their writing. They talk too darn much, and always about literature or some kind of gossip connected to it, and it's kind of endless; it always feels like it's going to go on all night, that talk.



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About 10 to 12 years ago I quit teaching creative writing; I've been teaching subject matter courses ever since. British and American poetry, Eliot, Frost and Yeats, or senior seminars, or Romantic poets. I figured maybe the younger people ought to be teaching creative writing, though I've done it some here and again in summer—places like Aspen. Henry Wallace and I were going to start a Danish folk high school once, but we never got it done. He went off and became, as you know, Secretary of Agriculture.

I remember one winter my brother Chuck and I went to New York and spent a month there. Met a lot of people, went to a lot of restaurants, saw a whole different life. It was the first time, of course, I'd ever been there, really ever been to what's called "Broadway" plays, and the places they come from. And we went to this theatre and I couldn't get over how small it was. It seemed to me they could hardly make a living on it. You see, I was used to seeing things held in our auditoriums, all sixteen, seventeen hundred people, great big sprawling places. And here was this thing they called a "jewel box"—it sort of felt like that—and I remember I just couldn't get over it.

One time Karl Shapiro came by and stayed with us, and we were talking about writing poems, and he said, "Well, you know, Jim, when you're writing a poem part of the time you push, and part of the time the poem pushes." And I thought that was really true for me, that there's so much discovery in writing a poem. You choose the starting point and from then on it's mostly discovery. The poem seems to go where it wants to go.

Not Robert Frost nor anybody else I can think of except John Synge influenced me in my writing. I just read an awful lot and I suppose I absorbed something here and there, but there was nobody really special. I tried to write like myself. It's like Donald Justice said one day; we were talking, and he said when he finished a poem he listens to it with his inner ear and if it *sounds* like him then it's probably okay. In writing a poem something is given. What is it the poet Valery says? "God gives you the first line but you have to work out the rest yourself." I often get a sound or a kind of musical rhythm in my ear. Well, that's the beginning of the poem. Or sometimes a line itself. You work on it and you work on it and gradually it evolves.

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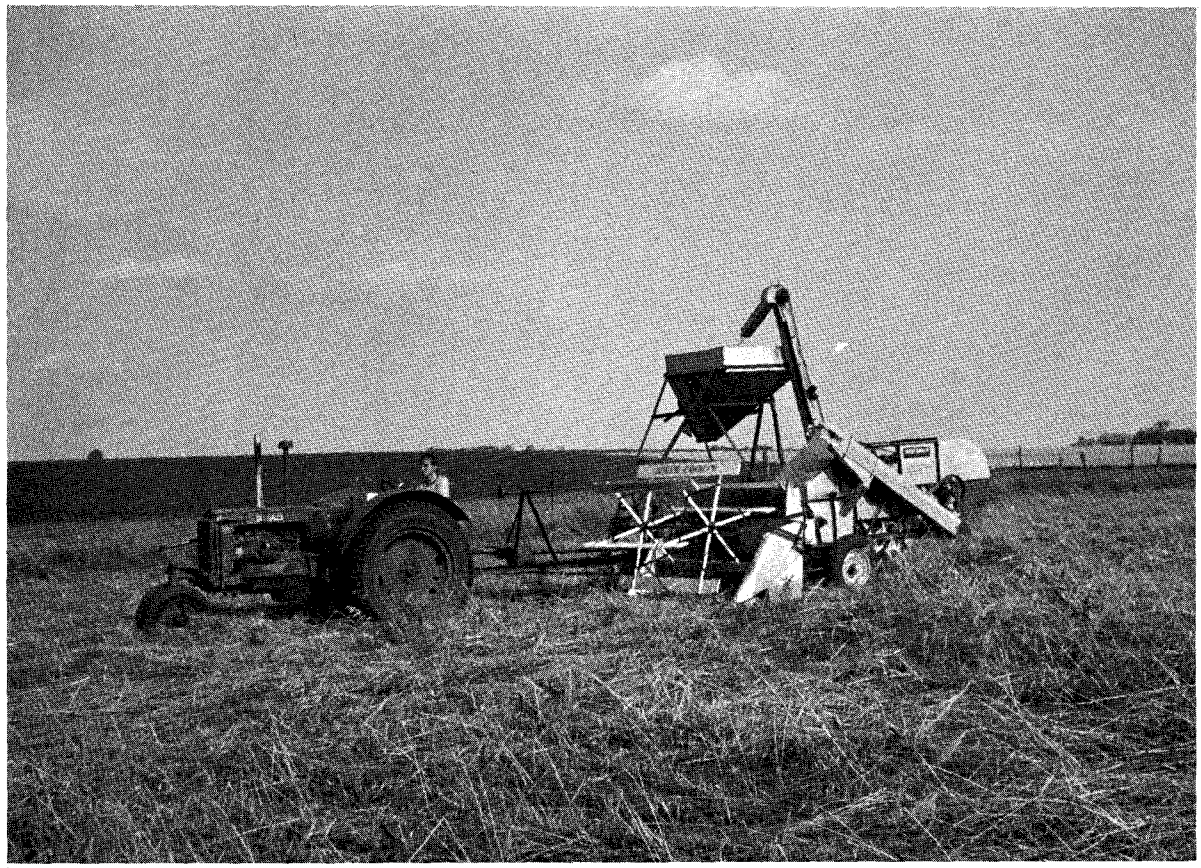

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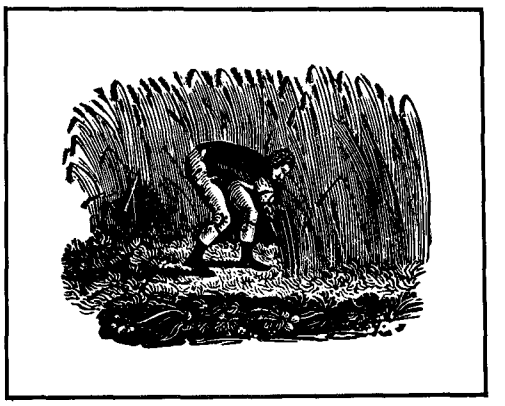

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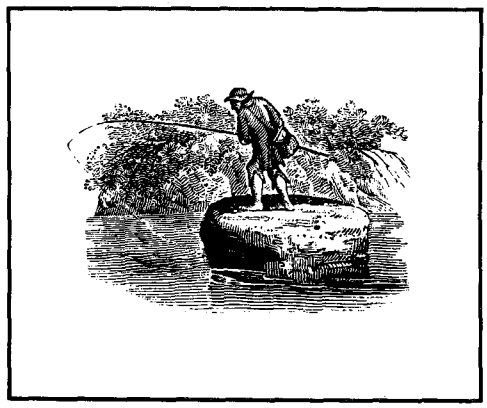

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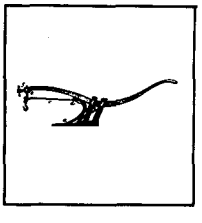

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A Story by Peter Saenger

Maggie Hawthorne

1. Mary-Ann

Maggie Hawthorne stayed three years in Paris, the loveliest city she had ever seen.

Toward the end she roomed with an English girl, Mary-Ann. The girl, with her wide eyes and pale complexion, was supposed to be studying at the Sorbonne. Her parents wrote stern letters to her every three days, reminding her of her studies. Mary-Ann used to read them to Maggie with great delight. As she read, "It's two weeks now that we have not heard from you," she would mimic her father's deep bass voice until she broke up laughing, "But you should really write them," Maggie would say.

"But nothing's happening," Mary-Ann would answer.

But plenty was happening.

Mary-Ann was not going to the Sorbonne and did not even return home half the nights. Her men friends would come to call—they all seemed to have mustaches, they were all older than Mary-Ann, who was twenty—and Mary-Ann would back out of the apartment apologetically. "I learn so much *French* with them," she once said to Maggie.

Maggie would have traded her knowledge of French for just one of Mary-Ann's nights. Not that she liked the boy friends or would want to see them in the daylight of the morning after; she just wanted the experience, in the dark.

When she walked through Paris at night, the white buildings seemed to become skeletons. She even walked the parks at night—although she had been told that was dangerous—because the dark forest was so strange and lovely. She would return home, dead tired; then she could go right to bed and sleep.

"Do you have no boyfriends at all?" Mary-Ann asked her, and it was such a simple, honest question, that Maggie did not at all feel on the defensive when she answered no. Then when the resulting silence seemed to be getting too long, she added, "I'm not pretty."

"But you're such a good person. You're kind. I'm sure there will be someone." And Mary-Ann was looking at her with those wide eyes, that wonderful open expression.

Maggie smiled and said she hoped so. There had been no one in Australia either. She had dropped out of college. Her father was the president of a bank; her sister had almost won the neighborhood tennis tournament and then married the winner, who immediately took her on a trip around the world. They said of Maggie that she didn't have a sense of proportion. Her father asked her once awkwardly at breakfast, "The people around here aren't your type, are they?" She hadn't answered. "Perhaps Paris?" he nervously continued. "Wouldn't you like to study in Paris? There are always so many intelligent young people in Paris." And now she had lived in Paris for almost three years, and still the check from the Australian bank arrived every three months. Although she did not communicate with her family, they paid for her, and they didn't seem particularly to mind her absence.

Mary-Ann kept Maggie busy. She kept getting lost in the Metro and making friends with all sorts of undesirable types and in general nonchalantly veering from one almost-disaster to the next. But then Maggie suddenly realized that the disasters weren't happening because Mary-Ann knew more about taking care of herself than she was conscious of. She knew how to keep herself from getting hurt. She never let her own emotions get too deep; she never remained one way or another for long. Perhaps it was Mary-Ann, then, who was the wiser one; for Maggie had no way to keep herself from getting hurt when she saw the lovers walking on the Paris sidewalks.

Serge was one of Mary-Ann's steadier boyfriends, but Maggie did not think he was specially favored; at least Mary-Ann never spoke of him much. Then one day Maggie received a *pneumatique*: "Please bring a suitcase with my things to the Gare de Lyon, Track 5. Look for Serge." What was she getting into now? But there was no way to make Mary-Ann have second thoughts, and the matter was really her business, so Maggie began to pack. As she was finishing, an English woman burst into the flat, tears streaming down her cheeks. This was Mary-Ann's mother; the daughter had sent her parents a suicide telegram which had arrived in London that morning. Maggie hid the suitcase, and while the mother made the rounds of the Paris morgues, looking for her daughter's body (she had written she would drown herself in the Seine), Maggie brought the suitcase to the Gare de Lyon. She found Serge—a tall, gaunt young man—and began to explain. But he gave her a light kiss of gratitude and ran off with the suitcase; the train was about

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to leave. As she watched the train pull out she had a terrible longing to be on it.

As she told Mary-Ann's mother that her daughter had left with a strange man for somewhere, as the mother turned from despair to rage, Maggie saw in her mind's eye the glinting rails leaving the dark cavern of the station, crossing with each other again and again as lovers meet and intermingle, running unbrokenly on and on toward brilliant mountains and dark valleys and tolling cathedrals she had never seen. She felt hope and excitement for the first time in three years.

2. *Abrams*

She did not even tell her father or her sister that she did not live in Paris anymore. She did intend, of course, to return to Paris after three months, in order to pick up the check.

In the crowded metal box of a Swiss aerial tramway she met Mr. Abrams. The night before she had noticed him in her hotel, sitting silent and alone. He came toward her. What a pleasant surprise, what a coincidence. The tramway car kept on rising and the white peaks unfolded, stretching on all sides like needles on a fakir's bed, into mist. She looked at his face. Wind whipped into his thinning, wildly-combed head of hair. He was handsome, in his late forties.

The top of the mountain was a barren brown plateau, rising at one end to a summit marked by a wooden cross. They began to walk toward it. The path was steep and the air thin; Maggie struggled to get her breath. Abrams, setting the pace, grinned, "Panting already?" She muttered something and kept on. Finally they stood at the cross and she felt how high they were. There was nothing higher in sight. Somewhere, behind the range upon range of white mountains, was France. She felt good to be here.

"How old are you?" he asked her.

"Twenty-five."

"If you're already twenty-five, that's too late."

"For what?"

"For mountain climbing. I started when I was twelve, in the Rockies."

"I'd like to learn."

"With me? Not any more. Feel this," and he brusquely grasped her wrist and pushed it against his spine. She did not know what he wanted. "Feel around there. It's swollen, isn't it?" she heard him say. Beneath the layers of cloth she felt the vertebra.

"Well, it's swollen, isn't it? Last week I tried one day of mountain climbing. I almost killed myself. It's too late for mountain climbing. I checked into an expensive hotel and decided to take it easy."

Later he said, "The human body is a wonderful instrument."

They walked down to the cafeteria and ordered hot chocolate. Abrams told her about the other ailments he had. Sometimes he had a ringing in the right ear, and there was a broken rib that still hurt him when he slept on the left side, and something that may or may not have been an ulcer. He had a wife and two children, and he had left them to take this trip. "We all thought it was a great idea. I mean we had begun not to be able to stand the sight of each other. So I left. I always wanted to go to Switzerland. I dreamed of it as a kid." He drained his cup. "It's getting pretty cold. Shall we leave?"

The cable car left the shed and Maggie was blinded by the light. "Is your wife pretty?" she asked, conscious that it was not quite the right thing to say.

"My wife?" He was silent and he seemed to be lost in thought about her. Finally he said, "She's got a right to complain. I made life difficult for her. I never showed consideration for her. I'm not worthy of her."

She wondered why he was telling her all this. They had talked of nothing but himself since they met.

It was late afternoon when they came back to the hotel. "Look at all these people my age," he said, sweeping his hand across the lobby. "Do they even think of exercising? That's why men die so much earlier than their wives."

A little later he said: "Did you notice? I'm the only one here with a young person like you."

It was true. It was the off-season, and the hotel was empty of young people. But Maggie did not miss them, she didn't even look around, she was watching Abrams. He fascinated her. The night was crystal clear, and the moon was in eclipse. All through the evening they heard guests call in to their relatives, friends to come to see the moon. The valley the hotel overlooked was tinted dark red. Maggie felt that a whole new world was being created. Now she sat at the bar that looked out upon the valley and Abrams was running on and on about all sorts of drinks, telling her the names in different languages. She didn't care about the words but as she drank more and more she stared at him intently and listened to his voice. There was no one in the bar but him, gently talking and talking. And when they went out to the deserted late-night terrace to look at the wild red moon he slurred something about rooms, so she went up with him and they made love.

This is what she had wanted to do for so long, this was what she had dreamed of doing when Mary-Ann stayed the night away, this was the ending point of the rails she had seen stretching away from Paris. Now she felt if not happy at least tired. "Did you say you're English?" Abrams asked her.

"Australian."

"What are you doing?"

"My father sends me money to live here."

"Are you studying?"

"No, not really."

"What do you mean? You're just wandering through Europe looking for people?"

"I'm traveling."

"So you've waited all your life to throw yourself on the right man."

"Oh, no, no."

"Good," he said, and he kissed her. "Did you have fun?"

"Yes."

He turned on the light. "I could leave tomorrow, if you'd like. I could leave tomorrow and you'd never see me again."

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And when she asked him why, he told her that he wasn't staying in Europe for more than another week. Then he was going to Canada, driving clear across Canada. "Then I'll go home."

So she had a week with him. During the day they walked the vast, impassive mountain slopes of Switzerland. They would hardly talk. On lonely abandoned meadows they kissed passionately. In his room she saw a pile of books: they turned out to be religious works—Catholic mystic poets, explanations of Zen.

"Why do you read these?"

He did not answer.

"I never understood why people read these."

And still he was silent.

"You want peace," she said.

Embarrassed at the quiet, she blurted out, "I'm looking for peace, too."

"Yes, we're all looking for peace," he said. And he looked so mournful that she kissed his forehead, and all she could think of was: he must not go. When would she find another? She was not pretty, when would she find another? It was a greed that took hold of her. She would not let him go.

"You keep looking," he was saying. "You keep looking for something to make you happy."

"Please don't go," she whispered.

"Will you keep looking for others for the rest of your life?"

She kissed him on the mouth to make him stop talking.

The next day he told her he was going home. He wanted to go back to his family. He loved them. "I told you," he said. Finally he asked her if she didn't want to go back to Australia, if it wasn't time to stop the traveling.

"Australia," she said desolately. "No."

He kissed her on the forehead and left.

She left too, that day, in another direction. She reached the Austrian Alps, which were dark and rainy, and left the train on impulse at a small village. She found a pension, and the old lady who owned it had a kind face. Maggie went out to a cafe and ordered something that Abrams had once mentioned, an alcoholic mixture called *Jagertee*. It turned out to be a steaming mixture of fruit juice, rum, cognac, and tea. She drank one after another and passed out before dinner.

3. *The Stationmaster*

She was already a little drunk when she passed by her old apartment one Paris morning and found, surprisingly, that Mary-Ann was living there again, with a man named Sorensen. As she peered at the name on the door and wondered if he was Swedish or English, the door opened and she was staring into Mary-Ann's face.

"Who is Sorensen?" she asked.

"You look bad," Mary-Ann said. "What happened to you?"

"Nothing."

"You look terrible."

Maggie sat down heavily on the living room sofa.

"I never had a chance to thank you for what you did for Serge and me. But it just didn't work out with him. I wrote a letter apologizing to my parents and came back to Paris. I felt terrible when I found you'd moved out."

"What did your parents say?"

"Oh, we get along fine again. They even know about Jim."

"Jim?"

"Sorensen. He's from Liverpool. He's a dear." At that moment they both noticed a pair of underpants draped over one of the armchairs, and Mary-Ann got up and took them into the bedroom. "Where did you go?" she called back to Maggie.

"I went to Switzerland. Then I went to Austria and I've traveled all through Germany."

"That sounds marvelous."

"Now I'm here to pick up my check."

She came back and sat down, very close to Maggie, and looked earnestly into Maggie's eyes. "You must tell me what's wrong." Maggie avoided her glance. "I'm your friend." It was true, she was the one friend Maggie had. But she could not tell her about Abrams or about the drinking. Because if she did, Mary-Ann would make her stay, and she did not want to stay in Paris; for three years she had lived alone there, there was nothing for her in Paris any more.

"I've got to go. I have a train to catch."

"Why didn't you ring the bell before? Were you afraid to come in?"

"I'm late already. Give my love to Jim Sorensen."

"Don't go yet!" But she had already gotten up and found the doorknob and then she was out, almost running down the stairs. It was not true that she was late for her train. She still had plenty of time to go to her bank and pick up the check. As she signed she noticed the teller, whom she had known for three years now, was looking at her strangely, or was it imagination? In the ladies' room of the train station she looked at herself in a mirror. "You are much too thin," she said to herself. "Your nose sticks out and your eyes look as if you're perpetually frightened. If Abrams saw you he surely would not look again." But then it was time to catch the train, to return to the German town where she had left her bags.

She went to the dining car and bought a bottle of wine, and she took it back to the compartment with her. The compartment was empty, so she watched the wide flat farms fade away and drank the wine. She bought another bottle at the station where she changed trains. When she changed trains a second time she was drunk. She had the feeling she had gotten onto the wrong train. The wine played tricks and she imagined the train standing still, the fields flying wildly backward, the farms and trees hurtling dizzily away, away, away. But she had truly taken the wrong train now, because it did not go anywhere; instead, the spur from the main line ended in a small gray station next to an old stone town that seemed about to be taken over by fields of tall wheat. Maggie staggered out, down the steps and to the bench: she could go no farther. In despair she collapsed. She buried her head against the wood of the bench and shook silently. She heard the train begin to pull out on its return journey, chugging out backwards, leaving

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her. So they had always left her. Everything moving away from her, while time passed. People. Happiness. While time passed. It was too much to bear.

She was lying on that bench for some time, perhaps for a long time. She didn't know; when next she opened her eyes she saw a small crowd had gathered round. She saw them stare down. She felt as if she was expected to put on a dumb-show for them. A man in the crowd said in German, "She's drunk." He looked down at her with a curious, expressionless face.

"That's right, I'm drunk," she said.

"She is sick," a woman said.

A young man in a blue uniform broke through. He looked as if he was barely out of school. "Move back," he said, spreading his arms out. He looked down at her and pulled worriedly at his thin mustache. He didn't know what to do. He had never had anything like this before, she could tell.

"Tell these people to leave me alone," she said.

He did so, and the people scattered across the wide platform to wait for the train.

"I'm a very stupid woman," she said to the young man. "What town is this?"

"Rothenburg ob der Tauber," he said soberly.

"Your English is very good."

"I have spent seven years learning it in the school."

"Where is the washroom here?"

There was a washroom next to the empty waiting-room, and there she threw up into a toilet. Then she sat down on a toilet seat and cried. She heard herself cry; it was a terrible sound, rebounding against the walls of the toilet compartment. She sounded as if she was drowning. She had not cried when she had lost Abrams, or during the years in Paris, or before that in Australia, or in school. She could not remember when she had cried last; she'd been too proud for such a long time. Then she went out and washed her face and looked at it.

She looked sick and old.

She came out of the washroom. The stationmaster had waited for her. He was still plucking nervously at his mustache. She walked uncertainly toward the platform bench as he came toward her.

"I'd like to sit here for a while."

Her crying had exhausted her, but the calm of exhaustion felt good, clean. She watched the train chug in once again. The trouble is, you're too sensible to throw yourself under it, she thought. She watched a family, old and young, climb into the train, a clock chimed five and the sun began to set. Suddenly memories came back to her about trips and gardens and running in the fields, when she was a child. Now the train had left, and she saw it far across the fields, its cars flaming in the sun. For God's sake! Hadn't this been going on long enough? How long was this going to go on? Was this going to be the rest of her life? She thought: I've spent my life senselessly so far. I've spent my life depending and depending. Loneliness won't have any more claims on me. My own self is my home. I've got to learn. For God's sake. You can stop somewhere, you've got to stop somewhere. This is where I stop. Here.

"What are you going to do?" the stationmaster asked, coming over to her.

"I want a hotel. I want a good bed, and a long sleep."

He grinned. "We all need that."

And then he asked her: "You're not going to drink, are you?"

She smiled and said no.

"Can I do anything more for you?" he asked. But she only turned to him and kissed him on the cheek. "Goodnight" she said, "Thank you"—he was getting red—and she crossed the street toward the hotel. □

DOUGLAS BLAZEK

THE FILTER

Conversations started long ago when
humans walked like broken chairs.
They continued in the velvet penis-sheaths of kings.
Conversations drove ships into tepees.
The balloon tire carried haggled conversations.
One man connected words to the ends of two hot wires.
In a classroom a youngster is combing his mind with his teeth.
Two people are holding tomorrow like a sieve and
are shaking through it some wondrous cornerstones.
The rest is silt.
It is great for filling holes.

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A STORY BY KENT NELSON

Incident in the High Country

They had followed the creek bed for a mile through deep snow and then had cut up the left slope through the trees to catch the ridge at about the middle. They worked their way up on their touring skis, Leland breaking the trail, followed by Hildy and McKay. After an hour they came out of the trees and climbed to the ridge. The road had disappeared behind them, and there was no sound of cars moving up or down the pass.

"There it is," Leland said, shaking the snow from his skis and pointing ahead. "That's home for a few days."

Tucked off the wind line of a hill was a board A-frame, and McKay felt a sense of wonder descend over him. He wondered not at the hut itself, but that it was there, so high up in the immensity of that land. For beyond the hut lay the contours of the high country, the white barren snow hills above timberline, one after another leading up to the rim of the Divide, and distinguished only by height and shadow and distance.

Leland was a blond, thin-lipped boy, who at twenty-three had far more experience in the mountains than McKay. Hildy was wild about him. She would go on these tangents with certain boys—mountaineers usually—and go off with them for months at a time. She was an enthusiastic skier and never at a loss for something to do. That was why McKay had called her. Hildy was his cousin, and he'd always felt close to her. Sometimes when he was down he would go over and let her cheerful manner bring him out. And so with that new terrible feeling he had, when he could not stand his own thoughts any longer, he had telephoned and she had invited him along to the high country for the weekend.

They crossed along the ridge, stroking evenly with legs and arms. Higher up still, just short of the hut, they stopped again to rest. They were above the trees and the world was a bright white, and the sky stretched wide and clear the length of the valley behind them.

"The biggest bowl is behind the rise there," Leland said, pointing right. "Wait until you see it!"

McKay could wait. He was tired from the climb and wanted to get to the hut. He felt a little uneasy with such a stark land around him. It was so immaculate and impenetrable in the winter, and he was not sure he should have come at all.

Suddenly Hildy lifted her ski pole. "Somebody's up there."

McKay strained his eyes against the glare and saw she was right. Far away against the white of the mountain a red speck edged across one of the hills.

"Looks as though he's on snowshoes and heading up to the bowl," Leland said matter-of-factly.

"Is he alone?" That was all that interested McKay.

"Shouldn't be."

But they could see no one else. They watched for a few minutes as the red point of color slowly traversed the huge field of snow. No one else followed.

The hut was in the drifts and they had to dig their way in. Then, while Leland got water from the stream, McKay built the fire. Hildy unpacked the food from the backpacks.

"What do you think of all this?" she asked.

"I hope Leland doesn't mind my coming along."

"I explained as much as I could to him. Everybody gets down once in a while."

He had come along because he had been driven to it by the sheer weight of things he could not face anymore. He had told himself these things were little bits of life that everyone had to face, but the commonality was no solace. Those small things seemed to hang upon him like invisible pieces of iron, each adding to the weight of the whole, accumulating by seconds and by minutes of each day until the weight of it had become too much. At first he had tried to understand it, to resolve and to break away to something new, but each time he decided upon a new direction, he found a new difficulty of living. With each movement the weight simply became greater and all his beliefs changed; he did not know where to turn. His life had become too full of shortcomings.

"I don't know what to think about the country," McKay said.

"It's just good to get away. You won't find anyone else here, and you can do what you need to, to sort things out."

"There was that one on the hill," McKay said.

Leland came in with the water. The small room was already beginning to heat up.

KENT NELSON has been a travel agent and a tennis instructor. Now working on a novel, he lives on the South Carolina shore.

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COLETTE INEZ

JUNGLE QUEEN OF MATO GROSSO

I am the ravager of innocent celery,
sun rays of carrots, blood moon of beets.
These are my salad days.

Eating a scallion, Cleopatra
in her loud green breath
submitted to the dynasty of death and escarole,
green salad earth tossed into space.
The salad of jungles.

I am the jungle queen of Mato Grosso,
blue eyes from the blanco
who entered the outpost, science on his side,
and submitted to raids, outsized butterflies
sapping his mind.

Plucking lice from his blond crop,
my mother, a Tupi, caressed his film,
lenses, cassettes, the Mozart LP,
ravagers of silence and flashbulb time.

Those were her salad days, endive, romaine.
Persiflage and twitting wit loudly absent
in the hut where blanco's skull hung on a pole
next to his Bufferin, quinine and notes
on the dreamtime of Tupis.

"You won't see him again," Hildy said.
"Who?" Leland asked, taking off his coat.
"The one on the hill this afternoon."

Leland shook his head and looked to McKay. "He's probably gone cross-country over the Divide."

The thought of it frightened McKay. Just the idea of being alone in that high country, with the cold and the night coming, worried him. He wondered what it was one had to have to be able to do such a thing.

And in the night, with Leland and Hildy asleep in sleeping bags on the wide mattress beside him, McKay woke up. The fire had gone out in the stove and the silence of the room disturbed him. He was used to traffic outside his window, to the sounds of sirens and trucks unloading and city repair.

He sat up. The moon caught a line in the cracked glass in the window, and he leaned forward to look out. Across the stream was a cliff with a jutting cornice of ice, and below it the white valley flowed away into the darkness. He felt as though he were gazing upon some beautiful and unknown soil, a place unearthly, which would always haunt him like his very best dreams.

For McKay was thirty years old, just beyond the possibility of going back and believing in something new. He understood that the ages between twenty and thirty were the hardest to live, but he had moved very quickly through that time before he had realized what was happening to him. He knew that his lean looks had changed in ten years and that he was rounder of face. Yet he had retained somehow a certain expression of innocence, capable of deception. But he was not capable of deceiving himself, and at last he had seen that all one's hopes and thoughts must be revised to include the body and the relentless pressure of time. Looking past thirty was suddenly like seeing one's first true vision of death.

The next day they awoke early. The sun had slanted in across the mountains to the east, and the sky was the light blue of ice. Leland was the first up to make the fire, and then, while Hildy made breakfast, the two men waxed the skis for the day's climb. Toward ten, with small nylon day packs filled with lunch, they left the hut for the Divide.

McKay had never been in the high country in winter. He had toured in ski areas and had done downhill, but he had never been up where the land was open and endless and without a track.

They climbed slowly, Leland breaking trail as on the previous day, and it took them all morning to climb two long rising hills of snow. McKay kept up because he climbed on the packed snow of the others, but each time he reached the top of a ridge, he believed he was there. And always these were false ridges, and beyond was another, gently rising up toward the Divide.

"Any sign of our friend?" McKay asked.

"He must have gone over and down the back."

"Not even tracks?"

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"Maybe we'll hit them," Leland said, "if the wind hasn't blown them clean."

By early afternoon they had crossed the snowshoe tracks and Leland followed them on the traverse. He seemed never to tire and to love what he was doing. McKay watched his expression with envy. It was an expression he wished for himself—to find and to love what he did.

Near the top Leland cut back from the snowshoe tracks and took the last part on his own. He struggled up, lifting the heavy snow forward with each step. But he did not rest.

At the top they stood for a few minutes on that edge, where in summer the melting snow would flow into two separate oceans. McKay had never seen so many mountains.

"Weather's coming," Leland said, pointing off to the clouds in the northwest. "Let's ski to the bowl and then head back."

McKay wanted to rest there and wait. He was tired from the physical work, and the view was unending. "I'll follow the tracks back," he said.

But at last Hildy convinced him to come. "It'll be easy down," she said.

McKay followed. He angled his skis downward and let himself fall through the deep powder. It was a good feeling, that gliding, and he let himself sink as though into sleep. Snow was everywhere and there was nothing to watch for and he closed his eyes.

Then, ahead of him Leland stopped and began climbing up again to his left. Hildy was close behind Leland; McKay trudged up again to where they stood. Then he was there, too, looking down into the bowl.

It was a huge scoop out of the mountain, and the sides of it curved down sharply from the Divide. Across the bowl was the cliff McKay had seen the night before from the window. But now it did not look like part of a beautiful and foreign world. It cut up in a dark swath of rock to the ice cornice which hung out over the edge.

"I guess your friend made it," Leland said.

For along that highest ridge at the top of the bowl, the red figure had emerged from behind a crest of snow.

"Must have spent the night up there," Leland said.

McKay barely heard. He was watching the solitary figure of the man move out along the ridge, closer to the cornice of ice. He was in clear sight now, and McKay could see his blue pants and his red parka, bright in the sun. It was as if he were watching someone in a dream of his own—a nightmare he had had a thousand times, and he was in awe and reverence for that man.

Leland and Hildy moved on, skiing down to the bottom of the millions of tons of snow in the bowl. McKay forced himself to wait.

For a few precious moments he watched the top of the cliff. At last, when the others stopped, he went down.

"Do you think he sees us?" Hildy asked. She waved her ski pole in an arc over her head.

"Doesn't see us," Leland answered.

The red figure moved out onto the cornice.

McKay knew differently. Leland may have had more experience than he in the mountains, and the figure made no response to Hildy's sign, but McKay knew more about that man. In that figure on the ridge were McKay's own nightmares, and he knew the man saw them. From that height the man could see the vastness of the mountains and the whole width of the sky and the great white apron of snow below him. The man moved out closer to the edge of the cornice and stopped.

"He knows," McKay said. "He might not have expected to see us, but he knows we're here."

The three of them held their positions on the hill. It was cold in that altitude to stand and wait, and yet it was not possible to look away. All of them knew how brittle those cornices were, how they broke in the spring when the snow turned heavy, and how the weight upon them could snap tons of ice like a twig. McKay knew the man up there knew it, too, just as he must have known the nightmare of living.

He must have known the terrible fatigue of nights in the mountains, sleeping in snow caves and waiting, eyes opened, for the dawn. He must have known it all to fight for survival in order to reach that cornice where he inched forward with such desperation.

"He's going to fall!" Hildy said suddenly, breaking the silence.

But the man did not fall. He edged out slowly and then stopped again. For a long moment he stood, and then with wild awkward movements, like a sprinter's starting, he took two steps and jumped into that void of rocks below him, striking twice and making no sound.

McKay did not hear Hildy's scream, nor Leland's cogent explanation. He did not see their open-mouthed stares, though he looked into their faces as he passed. In that same moment that the red figure jumped, McKay was moving forward on his skis with quick strides, cutting down through the fresh snow into the bowl.

He felt himself bog down on the flat bottom of the bowl, sinking in on the narrow skis. A sweat arose immediately, but he struggled forward, flailing with arms and legs. That gulf of snow from one side of the bowl to the other seemed endless. But he tried to run.

He had to run, but it was not possible. The snow bunched up against his shins, his skis deep under the snow. He had to lift the weight of the snow with every step. He thought of traffic lights, red, blinking, but there were no traffic lights in the high country. There were no cars, nor roads, nor signs. Only space, and still he could not run.

His breath came hard and painfully in the thin air. Behind him he could hear the swish of Leland's polished technique and Hildy's voice in the distance as she called "Wait!" after them.

A small blister burned his heel, and he imagined it growing and turning red. With each stroke of the pole, with each short slide and each lift, that blister grew until it had consumed his whole foot. His whole foot pained him and the pain kept moving up his leg, and farther until the pain had engulfed his whole body. Each step across the wide field was a torture, and when he heard Leland come up close behind him, he felt an overwhelming hatred. He was helpless. He could hear Leland's breath lighter than his own, and in his disjointed vision, McKay saw the younger man's graceful stride across the track which he, McKay, had already pressed down.

And so, when Leland stepped out to run ahead, McKay

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swung out viciously with his pole and knocked Leland off balance into the snow.

"Hey! You crazy?"

McKay went on. That blister was burning in his brain now, and his lungs ached. He felt as though his brain and his lungs would explode him into nothingness on that great plain of snow. But he kept moving.

The cliff was approaching now, towering above him and coming faster overhead as he neared it. He looked over his shoulder and saw Hildy helping Leland out of the powder. They were all in the shadow of the cliff now, and the line of the shadow was rising against the run on the hill where they had stood and watched.

He found a patch of the red jacket, an arm protruding from the snow, like a drowning man's reaching up to grasp with his hand the last bit of air. There was blood on the snow and a deep pocket where the weight of the body had fallen in. McKay tried to brace himself in the loose snow, but he sank down as he pulled.

Leland and Hildy came up. "Are you crazy?" Leland asked. "Hildy said you were crazy."

McKay looked at him with a glare. "Help me get him out," he ordered.

Leland came around and helped pull. They brought the red jacket out. It was ripped where the body had hit the rocks and the blood still flowed.

They brought his head out.

"He wasn't dead," McKay said. "He wasn't dead when he hit."

The man's mouth was filled with the snow he had sucked in beneath the surface. It had turned to ice, and with a rough motion, McKay scraped the man's mouth clean with his fingers.

"Doesn't matter now," Leland said.

"He suffocated before I could get to him."

"Hit his head and was probably dead already."

McKay felt his anger rise. He didn't like the way Leland kept breaking off the beginnings of sentences.

"We've got to get him down," McKay said.

Blood still oozed from the man's temple toward the open eyes.

"Going to have to get down ourselves," Leland said, pointing to the clouds coming quickly in over the Divide.

"Then you go ahead," McKay told him. "I'm going to bring him down."

Leland stood and cleared his goggles meticulously and strapped them on. "We just don't have time now," Leland said. "Maybe you don't know what it's like up here when it snows."

"He doesn't know," Hildy put in.

"Won't be able to get him down," Leland said. "Not if you can't see."

McKay looked from Leland to Hildy. "Think it's foolish, huh? Think I'm crazy."

"We know where he is," Hildy said, as evenly as she could. "We'll come back."

Across the bowl toward the low hill the sky was still blue, but as they stood waiting, the clouds sank and the ridge was enveloped in snow sifting down.

"You go ahead," McKay said.

The wind started harder.

"What's the point of it? What for?" Hildy asked.

McKay was silent. He looked down at the blood in the snow and at the eyes which still held a brilliance in the dull light. That man did not have to tell the living anything. He didn't have to tell anyone what was inside him, and neither did McKay.

Leland turned. The snow had started to fall. "Come on, Hildy," he said, moving his skis around and taking her arm.

"Wait." Hildy pulled away from him and went close to McKay. "Nobody's here," she said, speaking quickly. "That dead man isn't anybody at all. You never knew him. You never met him when he was alive. You don't know what he was, who he was, or why he killed himself. He's not a human being now. But there will be two bodies here if you try to bring him down."

McKay looked at her. He had never felt so exhausted. "You don't know that."

"It's certain," Leland said.

"*You* don't know that either."

Then Hildy turned, too, and Leland led the way, poling and gliding. McKay could hear the soft swishing sound for only a few seconds in the wind. He did not look up.

He went right to work and tied the hands of the body together. He got loose the battered snowshoes and raised the weight of the body onto his back, so that the hands fell around his neck. The body was heavier than he had thought it would be, and hard to balance.

As soon as he could, he began moving, holding tightly to a leg with one hand and using only one pole to keep himself up. He could not lift and glide even in the empty tracks of Leland and Hildy. But that blister he had felt before had now disappeared.

The snow came. In the gray of the dusk the snow was invisible, but he could feel it pricking his face as it blew across through the bowl. He carried on in the blizzard that followed, too, moving forward with even slower steps. The open snow made him blind, and the earth seemed a mass of that one gray—not cold, but simply a uniformity which dissolved shape and distance and time.

As best he could he made his way in the others' tracks, and then even the feeling of the hard surface was gone. The snow had covered the tracks over or he had lost them. The wind came across still, with nothing to stop it.

Finally in the full darkness he stopped. He could feel he was off the windline because he had suddenly dropped over a drift into a slight depression in the snow. The wind lessened, and there he put the man down.

With his skis he packed as much snow down as he could, and then he took them off. Then standing on the packed snow, he dug down with one ski. Working quickly, he dug a deep pit, and then standing in the pit he dug sideways into the snow, hollowing out a place to lie. He moved the man's body down into the shelter.

McKay knew he would survive that night. He had survived all the other nights, and he could live through one more. The others would be wrong. And McKay climbed into the burrow, too, out of the wind and the snow, and, inching up close, he put his arms around the dead man. □

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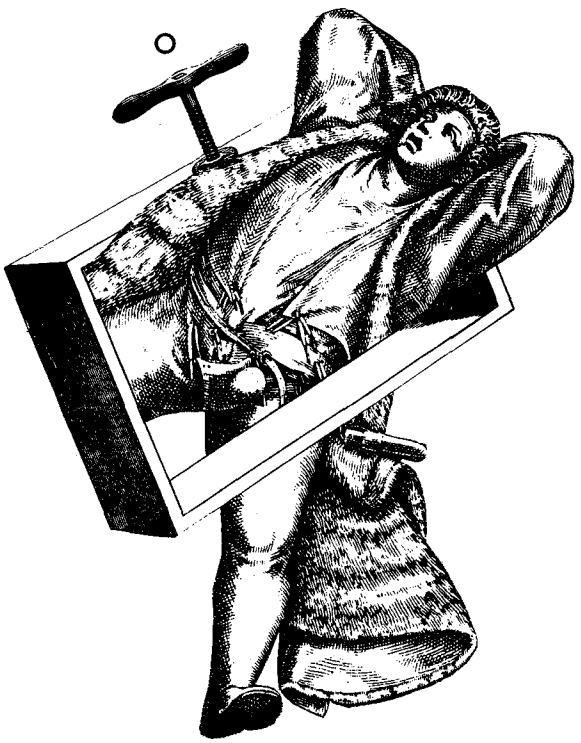
STEVEN BAUER



NOTES FOR THE SCENARIO OF A DREAM I

1. Her name is Marilyn, tall as a gin & tonic,
as full of ice: and he,
the silhouette in the window,
is trying to kill her.

2. For two reels I have been asking
what am I doing here? The director
whispers that I should shut up
and get back on the set. He wears
worry like dark glasses
and wheezes when he talks.
I tell him I am
miscast as the hero.

3. In the biggest scene
Marilyn and I crawl between the bodies
of dead cars. Gravel crackles
beneath us like electricity. He thinks
she's gone away and the damn scriptwriter
has me hiding her. She says, "We have
to find the bathroom." Alas!
Too loud. Car hoods open and crash;
in the white ghost of a house
behind us a light goes on.
A black shape is standing there. "Marilyn!"
I shout in case he thought she was
someone else. He knows; he knows.

4. He must be wearing a trenchcoat.
The music is strings & horns.
He carries a corkscrew.

DESIGN BY ROY BEHRENS

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NOTES FOR THE SCENARIO OF A DREAM II

1. His name is Moloch, impossible
in form. Green scales the color
of the plants in dreams.
His eyes tubercular, his roar
the sound of women strangled.
He turns water
to slime. These are the sins
of this suffering beast.
The city of Paris is terrified.
The Thames infested last week and now
the Channel.

2. I play the first victim. He grabs me
with ivory claws and squeezes till I scream
"God save the queen!" The part is incongruous.
If only I could be the hero
I tell the director. He is snail-
like, glasses thick as magnifying
lenses. Sunlight starts small fires
in his eyes. The head
of the studio is his lover. I threaten
his secret, his film.
I get the part.
He is not pleased. His chair
is leather and covered with flowers.
There will be trouble.

3. The picture is being shot
in black & white.
The green scales are the stuff
of nightmares and my imagination.
It is nothing my father would believe. ■

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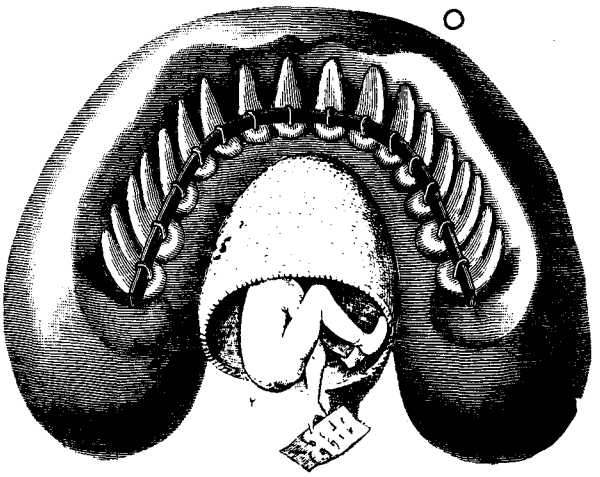

We are weeks behind schedule.
Newspapers tell us we should
go to bed, pull up the covers and not worry.
Moloch is a national trauma
but all will be well if we believe so.
I worry anyway. This is my
biggest role.

4. Meanwhile on the cutting room floor
discarded film writhes like a body
in death-throes. Forlorn frames
scorned! They slowly braid themselves and slither
out the door.

5. I am given a final love scene
with Moloch and try as I might
I cannot make it work.

Moloch is stealing the scene:
when he rolls his eyes
caresses me with ivory daggers
I plead mercy.

The director yells from off-
camera. This
was not in the script. He is trying
to ruin me.

6. Studio executives sit in the screening room
watching the rushes. "God save the queen!"
I scream and then appear as the hero. They
send out for coffee and Danish and look puzzled.

The discarded film
wriggles across the screen. It
is green as a leopard's eyes and twice
as sharp.

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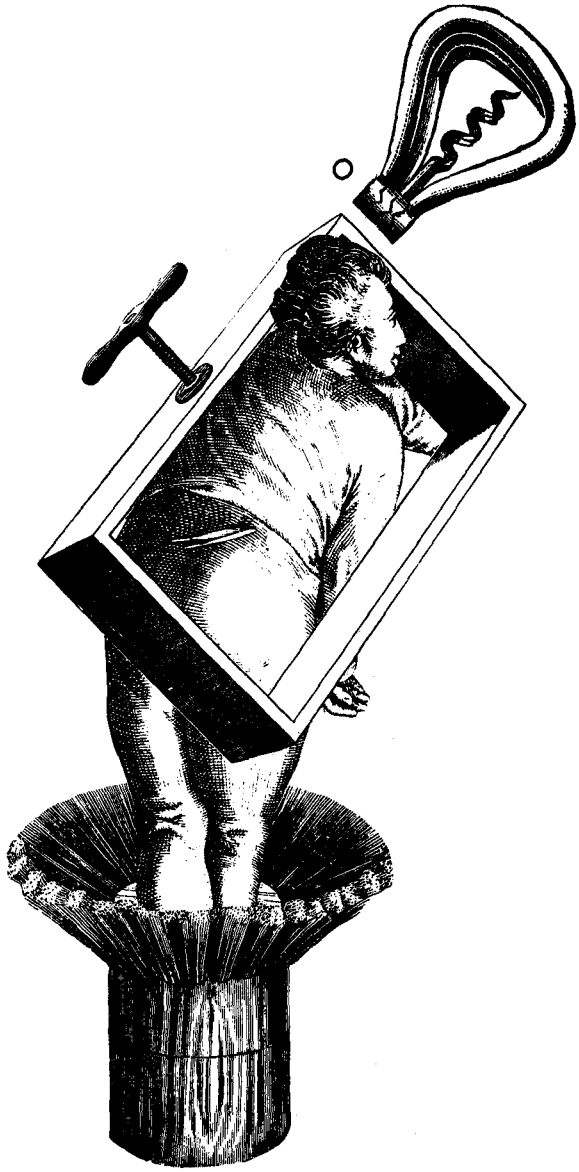
7. The director is fired for including
such a ridiculous image in his latest film.
The execs are quite right in insisting
no one will believe a foot of it. On the other hand
they think I am star material, galvanizing
and real. Even my love scene is raved over
at cocktail parties.

8. Moloch is restless. After the film
is canned, set on a shelf and forgotten
he rolls in his sleep; his tail twitches
obliterating whole suburbs. He is sore
about the part, angry
the role he played was evil, he is good-
hearted really, sensitive as cellophane to fire.
He visits the director at night;
interrupts him making love to the head of the studio.
They are terrified: he eats
them both.
Reports them
missing in action.

9. A new head is chosen. He has foresight
and releases the film. When the Academy votes
I am best actor and Moloch best
special effects. Thus
we are immortalized.
The discarded film
is still angry, terrorizes *Variety*,
destroys Grauman's Chinese,
stalks the Strip at night, immolating
billboards, lighting the whole sad place
after the spots are dimmed.
There is a monster loose.



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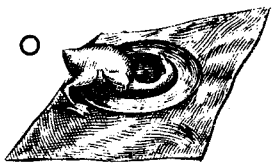
NOTES FOR THE SCENARIO OF A DREAM III



1. Moloch & Marilyn & I
together at last on the screen.
The plot is simple. Moloch is dressed in a suit
& loves Marilyn. His lines are fire.
Marilyn loves me and I love
money. There is some disagreement
as to who is the hero.

2. In the final reel I suffer a breakdown:
I am becoming myself. While I am in the ambulance
Moloch is seen sneaking into the house
where Marilyn & I are posing
as a vaudeville team. I am helpless. She
is slowly undressing, turning in the light
like a Christmas ornament. At the end
of her revolution Moloch is hulked
in the doorway. He sheds his suit
like a good bridge player. His scales
glisten.
With the lights flashing ominously red
I gather myself together and jump
from the ambulance. When I enter the house
Moloch is breathing deeply, the furnace rumbling.
Marilyn has picked up a chair; her eyes
are lidless.

3. As I lunge for Moloch he transforms himself
into a handsome prince. Marilyn swoons in his arms.
He throws me his wallet and carries her away.
Freeze frame: I am alone
on an empty screen and getting
smaller.

4. Icons of the mysterious.

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The Home Place

A STORY BY DENNIS BROWN

I liked Vic Johnson. He was a powerful man, about forty-five years old, and I suppose a wealthy farmer. But he never seemed to notice his wealth; like his family and his farm it just seemed good and wholesome.

I first met him through the church. He called me up and asked me if I would go to a father-son dinner with him since I didn't have a father and he didn't have a son. We went. I didn't have a suit, and he didn't wear one. He picked me up in a new Oldsmobile, the floor covered with tools and a grease gun. He wore cowboy boots, pants, and a shirt with a string tie.

Vic always walked like he was carrying a five gallon pail of water in each hand, but like it didn't weigh very much. As we walked to the church he said, "I'll bet you really get excited about church banquets." He smiled and winked so I could say "no" if I wanted to be honest with him—and I did say "no".

And he said, "Well, we're going because my wife and your mother think we should. You've got to do some things, because people think you should. But tomorrow we could go rabbit hunting on horseback, and I guess that would be up to us."

So the next day we went rabbit hunting, and I helped Vic with chores, and that's how I started working for him. I was thirteen then.

I came to think that Vic and I were friends in spite of my mother, who always told me Vic was being charitable to us. If that's what it was, he never let it show.

I remember the time I drove a tractor and a wagon load of shelled corn into the ditch because I was driving faster than he said I should. He was angry, but all he said was, "I wish you hadn't done that," and he never even swore at me. But when we left the blacksmith shop he gave me the bill for the work on the tractor and asked me if I thought he should take it out of my pay check. I thought he should.

I was seventeen and a senior in high school when he called me to work for him during Christmas vacation. The gravel roads were snowed shut, and I drove my old car out west on the highway and left it at a neighbor's. Vic met me with his snowmobile.

It had stopped snowing, and the wind had gone down so it was a clear day with the sun reflecting off the fields and the barn roof and everything.

"Beautiful day, ain't it." I met him glad to be out of the house for the first time in three days.

"Yeah, if you like snow—and I hope you do, 'cause I want you to move about a mile of it."

We had coffee with the neighbor and then started out. A half-mile north of Vic's home place we swung east. The snow was up over the fences in most places. I wanted to swing off across country and feel free to move over the land—freedom almost denied to modern man. But Vic was careful and slowed down for every drift. He stayed well within the power poles on our left and the smaller phone poles on our right.

I sat behind him thinking that perhaps this difference in how we would get across country was symptomatic of a basic difference between us. The question seemed to be important because it might be the key to the larger question.

"When you graduate this spring," Vic had told me, "you can farm if you want. We can rent 220 for you and you can use my equipment on it. After harvest, we'll start you a herd of hogs. You can live with us or keep your own house on the 220. You work for me enough so that neither of us feels like he's cheated."

I wanted to do it, but my mother wanted me to go to college and not become dependent on Vic. "You'll be a rich man's slave," she told me. I knew that wasn't true. But I didn't know if the difference between me and Vic was just the difference between a kid and a man, or like the difference between Vic's brother and Vic. And maybe *that* was the difference between a kid and a man, even though

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they were about the same age. I enjoyed the snowmobile ride just the same.

Except I was cold. I had on plenty of clothes but the air cut through them since I didn't have the nylon suit necessary for a warm ride on a snowmobile.

"I want to see what road the county's working on," he yelled back at me. "We'll have to dump milk tonight unless you and them can get the truck in."

A half mile up was Don Rademacher's house. Bales of straw were banked around it and the screen door was covered with brown paper which billowed out as if the breeze was making a joke of being shut out. Smoke poured from the chimney, and Vic commented that they must still have a fire.

Rademacher only lived in the house; he worked in the city when he worked. He was always quitting his jobs to play in a country western band which performed in bars. His family was on welfare a lot. We swung in to check on them.

The only mark on the snow was where Rademacher had pushed the door open so he could throw his garbage out—mostly beer cans. I knew Vic thought he was a deadbeat, although I had only heard him say so once when he found out that Rademacher had deserted his family.

Mrs. Rademacher was glad to see us and made us stay for coffee, although Vic didn't want to spend the time.

"Glad you stopped," Rademacher said. "You got a phone over there? We don't have no phone."

"No. Ice on the wire and wind broke the lines," Vic said knowingly; Rademacher nodded in disgusted agreement.

I looked about the house. They had closed off their bedrooms and the living room was overfilled with the TV, blankets, pillows, and amplifiers and guitar.

"How you doin' on fuel oil?" Vic asked.

"Making out. Can get by a day or so more. The county's sure to cut through in a day or so."

"I hope so. I'll have to dump my milk if they don't get to me by tonight."

"We ain't had milk or much of nothin' for four days here," Rademacher said.

I'll send some down tonight with Hunter," meaning me. Vic had nicknamed me "Hunter" because I carried a shotgun on the corn picker. He had pointed out at the time that a corn picker was dangerous enough without a shotgun on it. But I continued carrying it, and he never again mentioned it, except that he called me Hunter. Now just about everybody except my mother and my teachers called me by that name.

Vic and I left. I thought about telling Vic that we could use Rademacher's help, but I figured both men knew that.

"I'd like to drive," I said. "I might stay warmer behind the windbreaker." Vic nodded and climbed on behind me and we moved out to see what road the county was working on.

We went around the section but saw no signs of snow equipment. On the road back we passed Vic's brother's place.

The relationship between Vic and his brother was the one thing in that whole snow-covered part of the country which was not pure and good. They hated each other.

I had heard that years before they had been partners on the family farm. But they were very different and their differences destroyed their partnership and their brotherhood. Vic was careful and—I thought—wise, hard working, and successful.

John Bob was younger by only a few years, but a real kid just the same. Before their partnership broke up they had jointly owned a large herd of hogs when hogs were top dollar. John Bob had speculated on some more hogs without Vic's knowledge or consent; John Bob's hogs had disease and the whole herd got it and died. That was over ten years ago.

The brothers had divided what they could save of their property and had not spoken to each other since. I knew John Bob and liked him, but never mentioned him to Vic. John Bob had since lost all of his owned land by playing the Board of Trade. He was now trying to make it as a grain farmer on rented land and trucking on the side. What he made trucking just about offset what he didn't make grain farming, or at least that was what was said about him. He was poor, and I could see that.

The right thing would have been to stop and check on them like we had at Rademacher's. John Bob's two little boys were in his yard playing. They heard us coming and stood still to watch us pass. They did not wave like little kids who are snowed in should wave at a passing snowmobile; they only watched.

One of John Bob's kids was my age, and her name was Mary Beth, and I thought she was pretty when I thought about her—which was getting to be more often. I had thought about her more often ever since she had smiled at me in study hall. I didn't know what her smile meant and I had neither the notion nor the courage to find out. So I just thought about it.

I wanted to pull into their driveway for all of the right and neighborly reasons, and to see if she would smile at me again. Vic must have known because he was yelling at me, "Swing south at the next corner and we'll see if they're opening the blacktop."

So we went on by as if a snowed-in family didn't live on John Bob's place. I thought of nothing else for most of the day.

The county was opening the blacktop, and I spent the rest of the day trying to open the gravel road between Vic's and the blacktop. It was slow going for me, and Vic had said that he thought I had no chance of making it in time to save the milk. That made the work seem futile.

It was repetitious, charging forward in the big John Deere, getting a load in the bucket, backing up and raising the load, swinging sideways, pulling forward, dumping, and doing it over again. So I thought about Vic and John Bob, and about Mary Beth.

My mind told me that I was a fool no matter which way I thought about it. Once I'd think, *Now when you take that food to Rademacher's tonight, you swing past John Bob's and stop on the way back.* But I knew how Vic would feel about that. Rademacher and John Bob were good friends, and my father had been their friend before he divorced my mother and moved away.

And I knew that Vic lumped John Bob and my father in

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with Rademacher and "deadbeats". I did, too, but I didn't hate them like Vic did. For me to go to John Bob's on Vic's snowmobile might be disloyal; might ruin the only chance this world would ever give me to farm.

Of course they didn't really need to be rescued or the boys would have hailed us—even if they feared their uncle, they surely would have. What it really was—I wanted a chance to play hero with Mary Beth, and I would discard the best friendship and opportunity in a lifetime if I did.

But this also raised the question of could I be my own man if I worked for Vic? Maybe this was a good way to find out before I got into it.

I could think of no more honest or trustworthy man to work with anywhere than Vic. But the story and obvious result of his partnership with John Bob haunted me with little chills of fear. Of course John Bob told me every chance he got, "You keep foolin' with him and one day he'll stick your tail in a steel trap and send you howlin' down the road like a stray dog."

Yes, I was a pretty big fool for not just accepting that Vic only wanted to help me because he liked me. Vic was a successful farmer and John Bob was a self-made fool and if I didn't want to become the same, I would get shed of notion and concentrate on making a path for the milk truck.

Toward dark Vic pulled up behind me in the four-wheel-drive ton truck and honked and almost scared me out of my thermal underwear.

"You go eat," he said, "and take the food to Rademacher's. When you're done with that you stay in the house and rest but keep watch on the chicken house. If the lights go out, you come get me quick. We'll have to start my generator or they'll suffocate without the blowers."

So I backed the truck up to his house and he took over the tractor. I watched him; he seemed to be much more efficient than I had been. Maybe I hadn't kept my goal clearly in mind. Perhaps I had let him down.

Vic's father had built the brick home place over seventy years ago. It was surrounded by large pine trees. The tiny original home place stood between the large brick house and the new double garage; clapboarded, built by Vic's grandfather, it was now a tool shed, a playhouse, and a refuge for cats and dogs.

The brick house had fireplaces in the living room and in the basement. Most of the actual living was done in the basement. It was equipped with a kitchen, a bathroom, washer, dryer, ironing board, TV, and a table large enough to seat twenty men. Because the basement was such a usable facility for working people, and because it was also used for social occasions, I had seen very little of the rest of the house. Aunt Mae had a fire in the fireplace.

It seemed like every meal I ever ate in the basement of Vic's brick house was a Christmas dinner. This night it was steak with mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, home-canned corn, home-made bread and butter, real farm milk, apple pie and coffee.

"How far'd you get?" Aunt Mae asked me while she hurried around trying to get me to eat three kinds of home-made bread and more coffee.

"We won't get to the blacktop tonight," I said.

"Man's gotta eat now. Eat like as if you'd be up all night workin'; if the power fails us, you will be."

I wondered while I ate what Rademacher's kids had been eating and what Mary Beth was eating. I wondered if they had a fire in their furnace.

"Lord a-mighty! It's going to snow again. The weather man just said so. Eight to twelve more inches, and wind!" Aunt Mae told me. "You'd better get to Rademacher's before it hits."

It had already hit. Just the snow, however; not the wind. The snow tumbled down softly, and it seemed strange to hear Aunt Mae curse it because it was soft and gentle.

We loaded the snowmobile sled with milk and eggs and meat and the wonderful things Aunt Mae always had more than enough of in her kitchen. I left for Rademacher's. I was warm this time inside Vic's nylon suit and the ride seemed deliciously exciting.

I was enjoying my chance to play rescue, and there appeared to be no real danger. I should have known better when the wind began to gust and picked up tons of snow, hurled it a few hundred yards and then dropped it as though it had got tired of the game.

Rademacher had replaced his oil burner with a wood burner and he was cutting up the rafters in the old barn with a chain saw. I unloaded the sled at the house and then drove to the barn and we loaded up again with wood fuel.

The wind was gusting longer and carrying the snow farther each time. They were hard-driving gusts and seemed intent on knocking us down.

It was during my third trip to the house with firewood that the lights went out. The Rademachers had two portable radios and wanted to know if Vic had one. I was sure he did, but I said I didn't know because I knew they didn't want me to return empty handed.

It took Rademacher a while to find the one, and his wife and I listened to the other while he looked. Of course, I had to have coffee. I wanted to leave but they kept me on the pretense that we should hear what the radio said before deciding if I should leave or stay. The kitchen had four kids, two dogs, and a cat in it. I kept having trouble finding a place for my left foot on the floor.

"What kind of heat has John Bob got?" I asked Rademacher when he finally came in with the radio.

"He's got a gas furnace, but it won't heat without the blower and he don't have no portable generator," Rademacher said. I didn't say anything. If Rademacher told me to go see about them then it would be an adult's decision.

"They's gonna be a lot of people get cold before this blows itself out," was all he said.

The county sheriff was talking on the radio. He was asking for men with snowmobiles to help get stalled people off the highways, and get pregnant women to the hospital, and get people without heat to homes that had heat.

"I wonder if John Bob and his kids'll be all right," I said again, inviting Rademacher to send me there to see.

"Our phone quit or I'd call over there. But I can tell you he won't have no heat til the lights come back on."

"And if it's a country line down, the lights won't come back til the REA can get a truck over the roads," I said.

"That's about it," he said.

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I struck out for John Bob's knowing that Vic's lights were probably out and knowing that if he didn't get his portable generator going without me he would lose ten thousand laying hens, and that would be my fault. And what if Vic didn't have lights and John Bob did? What if the only emergency was at Vic's?

I went cross-country very slowly. If I upset, it could be over for me. The whiteness I drove on and drove through became dead chickens—suffocating chickens. They stuck their heads out of the cages and gasped for air and then drooped and died and Vic and I took them out of the cages and made small hills of them. In my mind I spent Christmas and Christmas week and New Year's taking dead chickens out of cages and making hills of them.

Surely Vic could start the generator by himself. But what if he needed me? He would not have gone to the trouble of getting me if he hadn't needed me. I was his man and he was in trouble, and I was driving to his enemy's house. A man would know better. In the first place he wouldn't have a stupid crush on a stupid girl and that wouldn't mess up his reasoning.

The wind became almost continuous, and I couldn't see very well. On the top of a hill I looked toward Vic's—or the way I thought was Vic's—but I could see no light. Of course he had no light!

I continued toward John Bob's. Finally I came to power poles and phone poles, and I swung left, staying between them.

The snowmobile began to cut out. I had plenty of gas, so it had to be ice in the line. Every time I was sure it was going to die, it would catch and roar along again. It did that until I got to John Bob's and then seemed to come out of it. John Bob's house was dark.

Of course; they were not at home! Someone had already gotten them out. John Bob could look after his own family. I got off and went to the door.

I beat on it for a long time and nearly gave up before John Bob's wife, Betty, came with a flashlight. She let me in.

"How in the world did you get here?" she asked me.

"Snowmobile. Are you okay?" I said, and I nearly fell because my goggles fogged and I couldn't see.

"We have been," she said, "but we won't have heat without lights."

"Where's John Bob?" I asked, wanting a man to tell me what to do.

"He took a load of hogs to Sioux City three days ago and got snowed in at Pocahontas. He's still there," she said.

"What do you want to do?" I asked her.

"We'd be all right if we had lights," she said.

"If it's a country line down, you won't have lights til the storm's over and the roads are opened up," I said.

"I know it," she said. "Lord, I don't know what to do." Then she went into fussing and worrying and swearing about Iowa winters and frozen pipes. But I was worried about ten thousand dead chickens, and I wanted an answer.

"How many of you are there?" I asked.

"Four," she said, "Mary Beth and me and the two boys."

I had seen the two boys when I passed with Vic and they didn't amount to much size or weight.

"I could get you on the snowmobile," I said. "But I'm going to Vic's. It's the only place anyhow."

Then she started fussing and worrying again about frozen pipes and what would John Bob think and did I think I might get a small gas motor in the barn to pull the furnace fan. I just didn't have time.

"Mrs. Johnson, if your pipes freeze and break, it's gonna be one of the smaller misfortunes of this storm. Vic might need me to save the livestock and I've got to move out."

"Did he send you for us?" she asked biting her lip. In that moment, standing in John Bob's entry way among the five gallon cans and egg cartons and cold cats, I thought I saw all of womanhood's grief for men's fighting. And I thought I saw that you can't fight a man or hate him without hurting his wife and his kids. And I decided that as best I could, I would try to avoid that in my life. Even if it meant that I could not be Vic Johnson's partner.

"No," I said, "I came on my own."

She went into another frantic quandary and I waited as patiently as I could, imagining the dead chickens piling up. Then I noticed the two boys and Mary Beth stood in the doorway watching us. They were dressed in their warmest clothes and appeared ready to go outside, but I knew they had been so dressed before I came. Mary Beth did not smile at me, and I felt like a fool for wondering about it in the face of these larger questions of dead chickens, feuding brothers, and a cold family.

"What if they won't let us in?" she finally asked me.

"They're Christian people," I said before I thought that I was in the middle of the one big question I'd always had about that part of the wholesomeness.

"It'll take me ten minutes to get ready." She finally made a decision.

"Mary Beth, you make Hunter some coffee," she directed. I didn't want any coffee but didn't want to refuse it from Mary Beth, so she made it.

"What fuels your kitchen stove?" I asked her while she made my coffee.

"A propane tank," she said.

While Betty Johnson got around, I tried to drain the pipes. I simply took everything apart in the basement that looked like it would come apart after I'd shut the water off.

We put Mary Beth and her little brothers in the sled and wrapped all the blankets from the house around them, and Betty Johnson sat behind me on the snowmobile. None of the great feeling of being the hero rescuer I had imagined while scooping snow that day was with me. Mary Beth had never once smiled at me. She was clearly afraid of the storm and her Uncle Vic.

And so was I. I could imagine him with dead chickens in both hands meeting me by the house, "Where the hell you been, and what the hell do you mean, bringing these people here?"

The storm was blinding and I had to drive into it. Mary Beth and her brothers pulled the blankets up over their heads and Mrs. Johnson tried to hide her face in my back. I had trouble seeing the poles and could see nothing beyond them. The mile to Vic's seemed endless.

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I became sure that I had gone past his house. Of course he had no lights, and I had gone past. I had taken these people out into a blizzard and gotten them lost! Again the snowmobile coughed, and I began to wonder about gas. What a fool I'd been not to put in extra gas. Vaguely I knew that if Vic didn't have lights, what he did have was dead chickens. But it didn't seem important any more.

I was not driving very fast, and we wouldn't be able to see Vic's until we were right on it. I knew that, and for that reason didn't turn around or try to ask Betty Johnson what to do. I was only driving about ten miles an hour because I couldn't see and feared upsetting us in a drift. But even at that I knew we should come to Vic's in at most five minutes.

I was ready to give up—and then I saw the lights at his farm. The lights—to guide us in and to keep the chickens alive—and I could see them just ahead and to the left.

I drove the snowmobile up to the house and Mrs. Johnson got off. We pulled the blankets off Mary Beth and the boys and all went to the basement.

"Aunt Mae?" I yelled, wanting to confront her first.

"I'm upstairs," I heard her distant voice. "We worried about you, boy. You've been gone two hours and more."

I ran up the steps toward her voice, telling her as I ran, "Well, there's a family that lost the heat in their home and I brought them here."

"Then I'd better make hot chocolate and open the spare bedrooms. Have they had supper?"

I stood in the living room and Vic's wife Mae was before me with her gray hair tied back in a bun and her flowered apron and her young blue eyes sparkling, glad that she, too, would get to help play rescue.

"It's your sister-in-law Betty, and your nephews and niece." I had planned this line for the long mile from John Bob's house. I'd selected it over, "John Bob's family is here" and over calling Betty Aunt Mae's sister, instead of sister-in-law.

The woman didn't say anything right away, but only looked at me and wiped her hands on her apron as she often did.

I could see that she was thinking, and I said nothing. Then she finished wiping her hands in a few rapid strokes on her apron as she always did just before she had decided on the next work, and she said, "You come with me."

I followed, and we went into a study cluttered with envelopes and bills and receipts. She sat down to write.

"Did the lights go off here?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Vic get the generator on right away?"

She nodded.

"Chickens okay, then?"

She nodded, but she was writing and her last two nods had been as if anticipated by my first question, but she had never really heard the last questions.

I watched her write; her hand was deftly accurate but as neat as my grade school teacher's. It was as if she was drawing a picture more than scribbling a note. Then she folded it in half and handed it to me.

"Vic's in the barn. You go give him this and then come get warm."

I stopped and read the note on the porch. I didn't even care if I was supposed to. It read:

Vic,

Your flesh and blood is in our basement because their house is cold. If you can't be civil to them, you stay out of the basement. I won't put up with any foolishness.

Mae

So that was it. They would stay in his house, and he would never see them. I took the note to the barn. Vic was milking.

"Did you get lost?" he asked me.

"No, sir," I said and handed him the note. I never called Vic "sir", and he knew something was wrong. He read it without a flicker of emotion. He folded the note and put it inside the chest pocket of his insulated coveralls.

"I'm about done here," he said. "You help me finish up, and then we'll dump the old milk and quit for the night."

We worked in silence until we dumped the milk.

"I wish," he said, "that all the people who's snowed in with babies and without milk could have this. I wish I could give it to 'em."

"Then," I said, "you don't hate me for bringing John Bob's family to your home."

"You don't have to apologize to me for doing what you thought was right. And you don't have to have me tell you it was right. And I don't feel like telling you that, so it's good I don't have to."

I didn't say anything and we dumped the rest of the milk. When we were done, Vic re-read the note.

"You say his family? He ain't here?"

"No, he got snowed in while hauling hogs."

"Yeah, well he never has been where he was needed."

We went to the house. My clothes were sweaty so I went to my room and changed. Then I went to the basement.

Aunt Mae and Betty were having a regular old home week, comparing ten years of gossip and recipes. They were planning to go shopping together. I heard Mae in the kitchen. "Men can be damn fools if they want to, but I guess those of us who've got some sense ought to use it."

Mary Beth was curled up on the couch knitting. Her long, soft blonde hair divided over her shoulder in a way that always made me think of a folk singer, and that made me think of a simple, honest goodness—the missing part in Vic Johnson's home. She smiled at me again. I got about as awkward as a calf on ice and said, "I s'pose we could play some cards if you want to."

"Yes," she smiled at me like she knew I was a big fool. "I s'pose we could, if you could get some cards."

I got some cards from Aunt Mae and we played rummy. I've never enjoyed rummy so much. But I didn't have my mind on it. I had my mind on inviting her to the Snowball dance if the roads opened. But I feared she'd say "no", and so I just settled for playing cards.

We played for an hour, and up to that time it was the best hour I could ever remember. Mary Beth and I talked about snow and school and snow vacation, and how we

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both hoped it would only clear up enough for the Snowball dance. She listened to my opinions about things and acted like maybe I wasn't such a big fool after all. And I began to interpret her smile as a sign that she liked me, the meaning I had wanted to give it all along.

The only imperfection in that hour was that Vic did not come into the basement. We felt the weight of his absence.

Then he stood there among us in his good dry clothes as if he had intended to come down all along but had to get cleaned up first. And he spoke to Betty just as easy and friendly as if they had been neighboring for the last ten years.

"Betty, you're gettin' fat," he said, "but you're still beautiful. I'm glad you came."

"Well, Vic, I didn't know if we should."

"Of course you should. That damn foolishness between me and John Bob has gone on too long. I'd of ended it years ago, but I guess I was too big a fool to figure out how."

As far as I know it was the first time in ten years that Vic Johnson had ever said his brother's name. I looked around for bells and sirens or something, but all there was to it was Betty hugging him.

The three of them had coffee together and filled each other in on the details of their lives. Vic said he would face his brother as soon as John Bob got back and see if they could settle the trouble between them. I listened to enough of it to hear that.

Then I returned to trying to talk like a man with some brains to Mary Beth, and trying to invite her to the dance. I didn't really figure the dance would be held anyhow, but I wanted to invite her and have her say "yes" on condition it was. But there wasn't any way with her little brothers and everybody all around us. Then Vic did what I've always thought was a fine thing.

He said, "We'll have to stay up all night and watch the chicken houses in shifts to be sure the power doesn't fail."

Of course, Mae and Betty and Mary Beth and I all offered to each stand a shift, but Vic said, "To be honest, I don't trust either youngster to watch alone. They're both tired and could go to sleep, and that's a lot of money out there. But they could watch it together for the first two hours. Mae's a light sleeper and can kind of half watch them from the living room, if that's okay, Betty?"

It was okay with Betty, so Mary Beth and I moved into the upstairs dining room to watch the light in the chicken houses.

We watched it for an hour and a half and went on talking about all kinds of things. We talked about her and about me, and I felt like I knew her quite well, and I finally said before our watch ran out, "I wonder kind of if you'd like to go with me to the Snowball prom—if it's held."

And she smiled at me and said, "You must not like me very well, if you're only going to ask me to something almost certain not to happen."

"Oh no," I floundered again, "I like you a lot. I would like to go anywhere with you."

"Well, I don't know if I would go *anywhere* with you, but I would go to a movie with you—if there isn't any dance." □

Kathe Agodoa

THE LUNCHEON

Somewhere between the quiche
Lorraine and the bits of mandarin
oranges dressed with macadamia
nuts and romaine, a wave of a hand
toward a rose rhododendron
necrossed in the air and hung
like a sculpture. The coffee
crackled into white cups. Each
blood-sucker nodded to another.
And someone asked: 'Have you seen
the other rooms?' I said: 'I saw
from the deck the china lake.'
The red-red lipstick smiled,
waiting. 'Reminds me,' said I,
'of the time I was talking
to the king of Saudi Arabia.
I said to him, Saudia, I said. . .'

Daniel Halpern

THE DOMESTIC CLICHE OF LOVE

In the brown basement
of the Turkish restaurant
the acrobat is on his hands
on a chair,
the juggler with the dinner's
supply of plates in the air,
the snake charmer
lip to tongue with his cobra.

You watch
feet in the air,
plates hand to hand
and the snake
complacent on the mouth
of another.

This is your life,
here in the brown basement
of my city – my feet
in the air, plates
at my fingertips
the logical extension of the cobra's tongue
that gives you that final kiss
goodnight.

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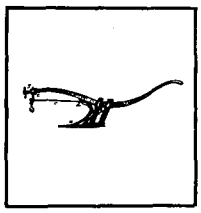

Peter Cooley

Self-Reflections

Charles Simic, *Return to a Place Lit By a Glass of Milk*. George Braziller 1974. 70 pp. $5.95 cloth. $2.95 paper.

Peter Everwine, *Collecting the Animals*. Atheneum 1973. 63 pp. $3.95 paper.

Marilyn Hacker, *Presentation Piece*. Viking 1974. 116 pp. $2.95 paper.

William Mills, *Watch for the Fox*. Louisiana State University Press 1974. 61 pp. $2.95 paper.

Yes, I'm ax-grinding: four new books of poetry lead me to consider the limitations of territory our poetry is claiming at the present. At least two of them, Simic's and Everwine's, share what I feel are a common shortcoming in contemporary American poetry. The third, Hacker's, poses some traditional, if workable, solutions and Mills' seems too muddled to be in the running.

Much of our present poetry has opted for a self-enclosing voice, a speaker who presents his experience as unique and solitary rather than connected to, or reaching for, a larger human community. This is apparent both in the self-representation of the speaker and in his attitude toward the reader; "I am what I am" he tells us descriptively, "take it or leave it." The sympathetic reader takes it, but he finds the poem unconcerned with extensions of its experience beyond itself and the speaker indifferent to relationships with others in the poem or the reader's reaction. Perhaps I'm pleading for a return to rhetorical poetry, not in the sense of elaborate tropes and topi but in the concern for relationship with others in the human world which characterized not only the Eliot-Pound-Williams generation but the "Age of Lowell", as someone termed it. Even "confessional poetry" derived from the rite which involves speaking to another with presumptions about a result. But now poetry's gone "naked" and onanistic; fragmentation and the thing itself as image are *de rigueur*, of course, as are the assumption that small objects and our own gentleness will somehow see us through. I wonder.

Charles Simic is probably our most imitated young poet at the present time. Since *Dismantling the Silence* initiated the strong Braziller poetry series in 1971, the "Simic poem" has appeared in many quarterlies and little magazines—and it has not necessarily been by Simic. Reading this new book can never return some of us to the astonishment we felt at the originality of the first one; *Return to a Place Lit by a Glass of Milk*, in fact, shows Simic generally trawling in that area where he first established fishing rights. But he knows where the fish bite and when.

Simic's poems are chill, talismanic rites alerting us to the silence around us and returning us shaken, though perhaps not moved, to an awareness of our own silence when we are finished reading. Their sources in the "deep image poetry" of a decade ago or in the fairy tales and folk sources of world literature are transmuted in his hands into oracular ceremonies where what is known is named through objects piled on one another until some riddle can be wrung from them. But often the riddle's answer is ineffable. We are constantly being urged backward—in ourselves, in time, in other objects—that we may occupy the present. From the book's title poem:

The sea is a room far back in time
Lit by the headlights of a passing car.
A glass of milk glows on the table.
Only you can reach it for me now.

But that urging is static; we penetrate a mystery, yet once we enter it there is rarely a deepening, a darkening, even a brightening. The monotony of techniques in this new book reveals, I think, the inability to come to terms with discoveries Simic's poems have already made. In many poems here the title is an object on the which the body of the poem rests simply to spin imagistic equivalents. "Watch Repair," for instance, begins like this:

A small wheel
Incandescent,
Shivering like
A pinned butterfly.

So far so good. It continues:

Hands
Pointing in all directions:
The crossroads
One enters
In a nightmare.

Higher than anyone
Number 12 presides
Like a beekeeper
Over the swarming honeycomb
Of the open watch.

At this point the poem has exhausted itself, but it continues the search for analogues:

—Other wheels
That could fit
Inside a raindrop,

Tools
That must be splinters
Of arctic starlight . . .

Tiny golden mills
Grinding invisible
Coffee beans.

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When the coffee's boiling,
Cautiously,
So it doesn't burn us,

We raise it
To the lips
Of the nearest
Ear.

The final act assumes a tremendous burden—action, interaction (perhaps), statement, flattening of the imagery built up. But the act and the language are deprived in their muteness. In part this is a problem of prosody since Simic's music is often the harmony of the objects charmed into existence and no more. As a necromancer he's a master, one who could develop more varied approaches to the mythic world he envisions. The biographical poem "George Simic" and the historical-mythical "Brooms" in this new book give evidence of his ability to do so. I hope that Simic devotes his considerable talents to new kinds of myth-making in the future.

* * *

Peter Everwine's first book is a firm, quiet one. If it shares aspects of style with not only Simic but Merwin, Bly and Wright and Levine, its similarities are as much affinities as influences. It is Everwine's tendency, like Simic's, to withhold answers, to surrender to image as fact. His syntax, too, is straightforward:

This evening, coming back to my room,
I find a weed lying
on the wintery field of my pillow—
a tiny disheveled head of light.

It is the word
someone entered by, and left
for the night ahead.

"The Gift"

He is more varied than Simic and never pretentious in accepting the indeterminate conditions of knowing in which he represents himself. And his poems sometimes show a concern, though not a method, for dealing with other people and for mediating a relationship with the reader.

The second part of *Collecting the Animals* is composed of translations of Nahuatl poems which the poet rendered through Spanish texts since he does not know Nahuatl. Though not as rich as his own in images, these poems provide an orchestration of different voices and tonalities (many are dramatically presented through different characters, human and animal) in an otherwise moderated but appealing book. Everwine, like Simic, is good enough to try for more variety in the future.

Everwine's book was the 1972 Lamont Poetry Selection. Marilyn Hacker's *Presentation Piece* is the 1973 winner. "We are creatures of habit" Hacker tells us in one poem, and her poems, acutely conscious though not often self-conscious, sound sestina-like even when written in no particular traditional form. The book does feature seven sestinas, at least half of which really come off as more than verbal exercises. The circling structure of all her poems creates an ability to self-ironize even while maintaining a straight face. Here's the beginning of a sestina, "Untoward Occurrence at Embassy Poetry Reading":

Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm
pleased to be here tonight. I seldom read
to such a varied audience. My poetry
is what it is. Graves, yes, said love, death
and the changing of the seasons
were the unique, the primordial subjects.

I'd like to talk about that. One subjects
oneself to art, not necessarily pleased
to be a colander for myths. It seasons
one to certain subjects. Not all . . .

Hacker has no excruciating existential angst to convey and her poems are not self-consciously "female" like all too many one encounters nowadays. When she wants to, she makes her speaker distinctly communicate a female point of view, an awareness of men as "other" without the necessity to represent that speaker in any stereotypically feminine manner. The men are "you's," a balancing force for her own perceptions in that tradition of the love poem which recognizes the speaker's playing off of perceptions against an opposite. This gives her poems tension, a traditional kind.

Sometimes (as in "Chanson de l'enfant prodigue" or "Elegy for Janis Joplin") Hacker's language creaks under pressure she applies to it, but generally she is an exciting new talent who writes varied, crafted, and successful poems.

* * *

William Mills' *Watch for the Fox* is one of the weakest volumes of poetry I've experienced. I read recently that the current spate of poetry comes from no one knowing what it is any longer. Maybe. But surely to defend itself against prose—which can use so many of the same devices—poetry should create a self-defining rhythm by breaking its lines before the end of the right margin, break them in some fashion which forms a pattern of significance in its own right. Here's one of Mills' poems, strangely enough called "Sprung Rhythm," in its entirety. I'd call it amputated prose.

I was just sort of rockin'
Along
Today,
Fixed the fence
Cut some hay
Patched a tire
Was about to lie
Down for a spell
When goddamn death
Wiggled down into my mind.
John Tullos is
Rotting in the ground.
It's seven days
We took him to town.

The primary problem in this book, though, is its refusal to deal responsibly with metaphor. Over and over an object is presented literally, then metaphor twined through it, then presented literally again. It's rarely clear where the metaphorical and the literal divide and yet it appears that Mills wants these aspects separated. He wouldn't have to. Here is "Fences":

New lady, in your slick swimsuit,
Don't move like
That
Leave an old man be.
The fence is
To keep old
Dogs from the sprinkler
From your wet hair—
Your gentle
Swelling
Big, new woman parts.
What's a fence for?
This old man he knows.

Strained inversion, syntactical monotony, set piece poems on standard subjects, poem after poem of equal size as if cookie-cut: all the predictably censorable qualities are present in *Watch for the Fox*. One of the blurbers on the back jacket of the book tells us he likes the book since he's unknowledgeable about poetry. He calls Mills "southern and haunted." Mr. Mills may be southern (he's from Hattiesburg); let me assure you he's not haunted. □

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THEATRE JOURNAL

Gerald Weales

London 1974

When I left for London in March 1974, the New York theater was, as usual, having its worst-ever season. There were fewer productions and most of them sounded so ordinary that, no longer propelled by a regular reviewing job, I seldom felt the desire to trek all the way in from Philadelphia (Metroliner or no Metroliner, that trip is spiritually longer than it used to be). Whatever vitality the theater had came from the fact that Broadway and off-Broadway were being fed intravenously by the regional theaters and successful off-off-Broadway productions; even the celebrated revival of *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (and Colleen Dewhurst *is* superb as Josie) would probably never have happened had an enterprising Chicago theater not asked Dewhurst and José Quintero to do it the year before.

So London, that great theater city, held out its perennial promise and, again as usual, London, that disappointing theater city, failed to keep its promise. There was a great deal more theatrical activity than there is in New York; there were some good performances and a few interesting plays—as the report that follows will show—but there was a general feeling of why-bother in the air. I am willing to admit that, like Pigpen in *Peanuts*, I may carry my dust cloud with me, but I do not really think so. Too many people seemed vaguely surprised that I spent so much time in theaters that they could not get around to going to. As it was, I was less diligent than I used to be; I simply stayed away from some of the big theatrical names that I would once have felt duty-bound to go see: Rex Harrison (doing the Pirandello I had stayed away from earlier in New York); Trevor Howard (in one of Anouilh's best plays); Maggie Smith (in a drawing-room comedy about VD).

The one institution that seems able to stir up audience enthusiasm is the National Theatre; at least I assume it is enthusiasm that sells out their productions, but it may be a complicated form of nostalgia since this is the National's farewell season at the Old Vic, its last fling in that uncomfortable monument before it moves into shiny new quarters. The only National production that I managed to get seats for was *The Tempest*, which, thanks to Peter Hall's direction and John Gielgud's Prospero, is both busy and bland. If Hall has a line on the play, it is not discernible, for what we get is an anthology of sorts—bits of scholarly borrowings and show-business touches that never add up to an artistic conception. Denis Quilley's Caliban is a down-at-heels Noble Savage, almost an American Indian, as though the production had to confirm the souvenir program's note on Shakespeare's use of the famous 1609 wreck off the Bermudas, and Prospero conjures up an entertainment for Miranda and Ferdinand so painful that it seems like a retroactive kiss-of-death on the whole tradition of the court masque. Shakespeare presumably knew that such doings were not really for his fans since he has Prospero break off the show abruptly; the only thing that saves us (not to say the marriage of those two kids) is the magician's "A-void! No more!" On the other hand, there is a certain amount of fun in the grotesque costumes of the spirits in the aborted banquet scene and in their dog masks when Prospero sends them in pursuit of the comic villains; a friend of mine, explaining how much she enjoyed the production, added "but then I love panto." The main problem with *The Tempest*, any production, is Prospero; he has to be the central figure but he has about as much to do as a dispatcher in a truck depot, routing Ariel from one corner of the island to another. If someone would play him, just once, as the irascible colonial slave-holder he is, the play might pick up immeasurably, but we are all too reverent about Prospero as Shakespeare, the artist's farewell turn, the drowned book and the broken staff. Even so, the character does not have to be so leadenly portentous as Gielgud makes him; those speeches do not need to be reduced to recitations. (I will never understand Gielgud as a performer—how he can put so much into a few fragmentary lines in David Storey's *Home* and then turn around and milk off the content of Prospero's best speeches, leaving windy exercises, words, words, words. It may be that he has reached a point in his career, in his life, that finds him—like Ralph Richardson—attuned to the attitudes, the eccentricities of young playwrights and that the book he should drown is the Shakespeare canon.) My general disappointment in *The Tempest* was assuaged by two fine performances. Cyril Cusack makes a wittily real person of that villainous old stalking horse, the usurping duke of Milan, and Arthur Lowe's Stephano is not only wonderfully funny but has a dangerously cruel streak that infects the clown routines with menace.

There were no consolations in the only other Shakespeare production I saw, a *Hamlet* so bad that it would have put me off the Bard for life if the play itself, so inescapably fine, had not spent the evening crying out, "Why are

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they doing this to me?" I had to travel down to Greenwich to see this desecration and I should have known better; it was one of three plays (*Ghosts* and *The Seagull* were the other two) that Jonathan Miller (medicine's gain is the theater's loss) directed for a season of "Family Romances." The English reviewers who praised the production have a lot to answer for. I am not really against intellect in the theater (a ten-minute chat with most performers makes me long for it), but Miller has always been a director with ideas and very little feel for the play he is presumably directing. I assume that he has some overarching idea for his production of *Hamlet*—he has always been keen on overarching ideas—but I missed it in the general hugger-mugger of bad acting. Take a couple of small ideas and let it go at that. Wouldn't it be interesting to have Hamlet's advice to the actors shouted offstage so that it is unintelligible to the audience? Wouldn't it be amusing—if a bit derivative—to have Hamlet deliver at least one soliloquy lying flat on his back on a low bench so that those members of the audience who do not get his upside-down head will at least have a view of his crotch? *No* is the obvious answer to both those questions, but Miller answers them *yes*. The sad thing about the *Hamlet* is that it has Irene Worth and Robert Stephens in it, performers I have greatly admired on other occasions. The Claudius that Miller and/or Stephens have worked out is incomprehensible in most readings of Shakespeare's text. He appears to be a rather avuncular old gentlemen (well, he *is* an uncle, come to think of it), more sinned against than sinning, feeling his way through his speeches, pausing in odd places, a hum here, a haw there, as though he had usurped the place of an understanding schoolmaster instead of a king. At least, he seems to be working at a reading of the part. Poor Irene Worth (and it was her Gertrude I wanted to see) is just bad, making her indifferent way through her speeches and then coming on like a nineteenth-century STAR in reaction scenes, all pop eyes and stunned surprise. Of course, Peter Eyre's Hamlet is enough to pop anyone's eyes, an essay in actor-ly affectation. There is no point in compiling a list of the play's minor failures, but two performances are worth mentioning since they seem to me to indicate Miller's weakness as a director. Antony Brown picks his way through the comic intricacies of Polonius's speeches in a performance that shows both wit and intelligence; unfortunately, it also shows great authority and ends by making Polonius the strongest character in the play, which can't have been what Shakespeare had in mind; Miller should have noticed. Nicola Pagett, who was so impressive as Blanche in *Widowers' Houses* at the Royal Court a couple of seasons ago, starts out as an interesting Ophelia, but when she reaches her big scene Miller gives her wooden dolls to play with and smears her face with rouge, making a battered doll of her, too, and the pathos and iron of the scene are lost in an idea about it. No serious critic should mention offstage disasters that accompany a trip to the theater (although an ordinary playgoer never forgets them), but this graceless *Hamlet* was preceded by an absolutely abysmal dinner in the Greenwich Theatre restaurant (who would burn a sole?), followed by the discovery that I had missed the last train back into London and by a headlong fall into the gutter as I hurried to board a bus. I mention these things only because I suspect that Jonathan Miller was in charge of the kitchen and the transportation as well as the play and that he tripped me as I stepped off the curb.

Happily, I saw no Shakespeare done by the Royal Shakespeare Company. When I was there, they were just revving up for the big summer push at Stratford and the London season at the Aldwych was marking time. It shows a certain frivolity of mind, I suppose, but I am usually happier with the RSC in their lighter moments, as in the delightful *London Assurance* a few years ago. This year it is a handsome production of the William Gillette version of *Sherlock Holmes* with John Wood all irony and intellect in the title role. Although Mrs. Faulkner, a dispensable character, is dropped from the play, the RSC sticks fairly closely to the original script, getting contemporary responses by emphasizing rather than doctoring what is there. The play is amusing, but it never becomes camp parody, as American revivals of nineteenth-century plays too often do. The derring-do is played with a touch of exaggeration, of course—the play does date from the 1890s—but the audience is expected to be, and is, sucked in by the plot, not superior to it. *Sherlock Holmes* is not nearly as good a play as *London Assurance* is, but it is—as William Gillette knew it was—an efficient skeleton on which to hang an evening of good theater. Despite the English setting and the hand of Conan Doyle in the making of the play, *Sherlock Holmes* is a reflection of the American theater in which Gillette starred. There is probably a lesson in the production for all of us; as the Bicentennial slouches its way toward Washington to be born, there will be an increasing amount of talk about reviving the American theatrical past. Let's hope someone has the sense to recognize—as this *Sherlock Holmes* does—that it can be done with both wit and respect.

If *Sherlock Holmes* is elegant fun, the other RSC production I saw, David Mercer's new play, *Duck Song*, is, I'm afraid, very serious indeed. Unless it is some kind of lugubrious joke, the point of which I do not get. Mercer, who is best known here as the creator of *Morgan*, has some witty dialogue and some potentially interesting eccentric characters (hardly in a class with the septuagenarian, motorcycle-riding clergyman hero of his *Flint*), but—as befits a Doomsday play—*Duck Song* finally stifles in its own pretentiousness. Mercer's cast of characters—a once successful painter who has taken refuge in sleep, his Socialist safe-cracker brother, his psychologist daughter and her layabout lover, a whining petty thief—are trapped into some kind of mystical experience when the safe-cracker's ex-wife comes back from America with an Indian, named Lee Mcguire, in tow (after Denis Quilley's Caliban, it began to look like American-Indian year in London), and the play ends with everyone crouching center stage, brushed by the hand of mortality, while overhead the wild ducks call. No one apparently says the magic word: no duck drops out of the wings with a fifty-dollar prize in its beak and a Groucho gag to smooth its path. The play is certainly not helped

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by a flaccid production, although I am not sure that anything could help it. In a generally undistinguished cast (Elizabeth Spriggs, one of the most talented people at the RSC, was ill the day I saw it), a special prize should go to Carole Hayman who manages—in a season full of lousy American accents—to come up with the year's silliest stage American.

* * *

Mercer's play was one of the first things I saw when I got to London, but that experience at the Aldwych did not deter me from trying to see as many new English plays as possible. The best of them, predictably, turned out to be David Storey's *Life Class*. After all, Storey is the most consistently interesting of what John Russell Taylor calls, in the title of his book, *The Second Wave*, and the Royal Court, where it played, is the theater most likely to come up with productions one wants to see. *Life Class*, like most of Storey's work, is a meticulously designed play so realistic that it becomes almost artificial in its stylization. It is rather plot-y compared to *The Contractor* or *The Changing Room*, but it is built on the same pattern of preparation and withdrawal. It opens on an empty classroom in an art school as the instructor begins to arrange the furniture for a life class and the students and the model arrive, and it ends with the instructor, now fired, alone in the room in which all evidence of the class has been removed. In between, there is a great deal of apparently aimless talk, a mock rape and hints that the instructor's life outside the classroom—his marriage—has gone to pieces. As usual with Storey, there is a sense of old virtues collapsed in the contrast between the head of the school, who believes in art and discipline but steals coal to carry home, and the students, most of whom appear to lack both talent and vocation; and, as usual with Storey, there is no clear sense of the author's choosing sides. The instructor, an artist who works in events rather than oil or stone, teaches a life class in more ways than one; he suggests, as the play ends, that he has manipulated the events that lead to his own dismissal, but the play's constant attention to the limitations of art (the distance between intention and result) suggests that the event created is not the event conceived, that his control of his materials (his students, his colleagues) is as imperfect as the students' control of crayon and paper. Since Alan Bates plays the lead and since Storey gives him a number of acid lines about his students' work, there is an inevitable echo of *Butley*, but Simon Gray's play is all plot at the expense of form, an almost sentimental presentation of an unpleasant *angst*-eater cutting himself off from human contact. Storey is after much more fascinating aesthetic game and he holds onto his audience with a minimum of conventional theatrical flashiness.

Aside from *Life Class*, the most interesting new play I saw is David Hare's *Knuckle*. Its view of England is of a totally corrupt society in which

the proper businessman is capable of the ugliest and most brutal social behavior, and it is a bit preachy in its insistence that we share that view. What saves it from being a tract is that Hare has come up with a workable dramatic device that makes his point more effectively than any of the sermons can. His hero is a gun-runner, an honest bad guy who comes home to solve his sister's murder, only to find that the sister is not dead and that his villainous father is human, that he cannot really operate in the relativistic world of contemporary morality. There is a girl who expects him to act directly although he is surrounded by indirection, and, appropriately enough, she operates a night club in which the ambience and the decor shout 1930s. Curly is, in effect, a Humphrey Bogart hero at least thirty years too late and, failing to win the girl or solve the mystery or stop the villains, he retreats into the black-and-white security of his mini-munitions business. There are some problems with the play—a certain windiness, Hare's not recognizing that the play ends one scene before it stops—but it is the production that is really at fault. Edward Fox's Curly has neither a contemporary reality nor a Bogartian echo; he is a thing of abrupt mannerisms and oddly inflected lines, and he is, unhappily, on stage most of the time. *Knuckle*, in someone else's hands, might prove theatrically effective, building a nostalgia for other eras, other certitudes, and then capsizing the audience by pulling the rug out from under its hero. The *Knuckle* I saw had to struggle to hold its own in the face of a destructive star performance.

Peter Nichol's *Chez Nous* makes an excellent contrast to *Knuckle*. It is expertly acted—by Denholm Elliott, Albert Finney, Geraldine McEwan and Pat Heywood—but it is so fragile that, in retrospect, it scarcely seems to exist. As one might expect from the author of *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* and *The National Health*, there is a barb in the "domestic comedy" label that Nichols puts on the play. It deals with two couples—old friends all—meeting at a farmhouse in the South of France, and it is mainly concerned with the discovery that Phil (Finney) is the father of the illegitimate child of the fourteen-year-old daughter of Dick and Liz (Elliott and Heywood). At the end, two bad marriages are kept together when Diana (McEwan) is too dead, spiritually, to cut and run with Dick, and the child, the perennial life image, casts a *gemütlich* pall over the pastel scene. I always have the feeling with Nichols that he is a playwright who does not have the imagination for genuine black-comedy ugliness nor the substance to deal with the serious themes that lace his comedies. *Chez Nous* does nothing to change that feeling.

When Alan Ayckbourn's *Absurd Person Singular* was announced for Broadway production for Fall, 1974, one of the PR-fed press announcements called the author England's Neil Simon. So he is. He writes extremely popular comedies which are really character sketches that catch middle-class types in situations of social and personal frustration. An author who cared more for his characters might use the material to write serious plays (or at least high-toned soap opera), but Ayckbourn goes for laughs. In *Absurd*

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Person Singular, which uses the same three couples on three different Christmases, we move from Jane's being trapped outside her kitchen in pouring rain (standard farce) to Eva's unsuccessful attempts to commit suicide amid an unobserving crowd (black comedy?) to Marion's alcoholic turn (medical case as stage drunk). The whole thing depressed me a great deal, but I stayed until the bitter end—and I use that phrase not as a handy cliché but as an apt description. By way of contrast—perhaps to show that the young have a better sense of values—let me point to a student of mine I met at the theater. She had just got off a plane and, with only a week of theater-going ahead of her, had rushed to the nearest available matinee. "I'm leaving," she said at the end of the second act. "I've got another show to see tonight and I think a cup of coffee would do me more good than another act of this."

The only other new English play I saw was by William Douglas Home, who not only pre-dates the Second Wave, but the aging Angry Young Men as well. He writes literate drawing-room comedies, designed to make a mild social point, and in recent years they have found a proper home in the elegant Savoy Theatre. The general election of 1970 is "the edifice on which the play is built," as Home says in a program note for *At the End of the Day*, and, indeed, it is the story of an excessively vain Labour Prime Minister who, much to his surprise, is defeated by his stuffy, unattractive Conservative opponent. Its chief theatrical virtue is to provide an opportunity for John Mills to imitate Harold Wilson and Michael Denison to do an Edward Heath turn. If Home were not such a gentle playwright, one might suspect him of writing nasty political satire—in a mix-up of papers, the Conservative reads the acceptance speech prepared for the Labour leader and no one notices the difference—but the play, safe in its Savoy house, is like a warm cocoon around the Establishment. The general election of 1974, in which a newly humble Harold Wilson won over a self-righteous Edward Heath, put a finish to the play's run, leaving the Savoy free for a new Robert Morley farce.

Cowboy Mouth is not a new play and Sam Shepard is not exactly an English playwright, but I did go to one of the lunchtime theaters to see a reasonably good production of *Mouth*, a short play awash with familiar Shepard themes and images. Come to think of it, London is awash with Shepard plays, now that the playwright has settled down over there. Whatever personal value such a move may have, I think it may be a mistake aesthetically (like Sean O'Casey's move from Ireland to England), for Shepard's idiom is so relentlessly American and his plays so obviously verbal constructs that he may find himself cut off from his creative source. I got to England too late to see his most recent play, *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*, Upstairs at the Royal Court, but I did see it on television and, for the first time at a Shepard play, I found it

difficult to listen. *Dreamer* is a Shepardian re-working of *Three Men on a Horse*, in which the Dreamer, who picks the winners for the gangsters, is finally freed when his geography dream, a dream of home out West, conjures up a rescue posse. This conceit, which ordinarily would have held my attention, was lost to me as I found myself listening to the way the English actors mangled the rhythm of the lines. It was only when Donal Donelly got to do an Irish bit—when the Dreamer was momentarily naming dog-track winners—that the play became as vividly alive as I expect a Shepard play to be.

* * *

Productions by august institutions and new plays are not the whole story of English theater, but the revivals, the camp specialities, the nostalgic turns need only a nod, a reminder that they are part of the London theatrical scene. Noel Coward is apparently this year's favorite revival playwright and, if the reasonably amusing *Design for Living* I saw is an example, he is being done as an excuse to design Art Deco sets; even Vanessa Redgrave, as Gilda, is almost pure Art Deco. Judi Dench, that exquisite young woman, is sharing nonsense honors with Edward Woodward and Leo McKern in a Ferenc Molnar trifle, *The Wolf*. *The Rocky Horror Show*, a fashionable success among the middle-aged young, is a largely inaudible fake rock show which mixes transvestism with idiotic parody of sci-fi and horror movies. It seems all the sillier, if one goes—as I did— to *The Danny La Rue Show*, for Danny La Rue is a female impersonator with great style and a masculine music-hall sense of comedy which makes the worst puns and the most obvious double entendres seem funny; he has, alas but understandably, surrounded himself with a show that is too bad even to be amusing (except perhaps for a troupe of Argentinian dancers, Los Diablos del Bombo, who perform with drums, swords and boleadoras); it is like a naughty Lawrence Welk show into which a supremely professional performer has inexplicably stumbled. This is said to be Danny La Rue's last West End show (he will keep his night club), but there was no hint of farewell about another theatrical oddity I saw—*Edith Evans...and Friends*. Dame Edith, at 86, in her first stage appearance since 1965, shares the bill with twin pianists who necessarily spell her between brief recitations. This is the kind of show that I ordinarily detest—amusingly fragile poems, snippets of plays—but there is something reassuring in watching a woman her age quaver her way into a piece and, once there, become suddenly strong and forceful and Edith Evans still. I was told that Charles Marowitz, on one of those talk shows that infest English television, made a snotty but oblique reference to the Evans evening. Although the distance between him and Dame Edith—one of talent as well as of time—is obviously great, he ought to be able to recognize a theatrical image when it appears. Edith Evans at the Theatre Royal—whatever her program—stands for the survival of English theater and that should mean as much to the impresario of The Open Space, an American in exile, as it does to me, a visiting American who understands but regrets the "why-bother" I felt around me. □

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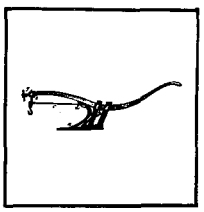

Lawrence Sturhahn

The Big Con

[The name of the game is con; once you're hooked the question is how you feel when you walk away, having been stung?]

At the climax of the movie the feeling in the theatre is palpable. The two heroes, charming grifters with whom the audience identifies thoroughly, are shot dead. It happens in the fantastic betting parlor that the audience watched being created from empty rooms down an alley in a city that's supposed to be Chicago during the depression. Although the big con has been played successfully against a villain who wears a black suit, walks with a limp, and has no compunction about having people killed, something is wrong.

You say to yourself, heh, wait a minute. Up to now it was all funny and I was laughing. It was exciting and I was hooked, waiting to find out what was going to happen next. But now, though successful, they are also dead. The feeling is very *heavy*—wait a minute . . .

That's *the sting* in *The Sting*. The film's creators have the audience playing for all it's worth.

* * *

In the '30s and '40s what Hollywood produced was entertainment, fantasy, magic, and illusion. If you walk the back lots today—and only Burbank Studio and Universal are still there—what you see is Camelot across a littered New York 50th Street from the First National Bank of Centerville, U.S.A. You stare at crumbling facades of buildings, plaster falling, false fronts supported by massive timbers, doors and empty windows open to the rainy sky.

Then, around the next corner, a crew is shooting an episode for "The Waltons" or "Kung Fu." Actors are in costume, plaster patched, glass in the windows, everything is very real. It's a feeling of stumbling around in never-never land, the child filled with awe, waiting for what he'll see next. A dinosaur . . . the Cavalry coming to rescue the stagecoach . . . sexy Esther Williams in her one-piece bathing suit.

Last fall on KQED here in San Francisco I watched, enthralled, Richard Schickel's "The Men Who Made The Movies." The series, produced for PBS, concerned the Pantheon Directors of American film. With some knowledge of the history of the motion picture in the United States I remember that at the time these men made their films, what was good in a film lay in—and came out of—the system, the *studios*, and the men who ran them. Samuel Goldwyn said: "I made *Wuthering Heights*, William Wyler only directed it."

Since then the concept of the *auteur* has surfaced (although I think it's more accurate to say *re*surfaced), so when I watched Frank Capra (76), Howard Hawks (77), King Vidor (77), George Cukor (74), William Wellman (77), Alfred Hitchcock (75), Vicente Minnelli (61)—all energetic, articulate, creative men—it was as though that old image of studio dropped away, and I saw beyond. I recognized that, yes—they created the films because they were smart enough to nurture these men who directed them.

"Their task was essentially," Schickel said, "to establish the genres, the conventions, which characterize the American film—one of the most highly stylized of theatrical forms—during a period we now recognize, I think, as not only its most economically powerful, but also its most richly creative.

"They're the last of a dying breed, representative of the second and third generation of filmmakers who came to their craft just as the pioneers and D. W. Griffith's generation were finishing their exploratory work, and when the medium, having outgrown the nickelodeon stage, was reaching for length, for complexity of characterization and story development."

To understand the conventions, appreciate the motion towards complexity in both story and character, was easier because of the way the series was presented—sequences from the director's works, not complete pictures. As Rudolf Arnheim said: *The effect of a film is more than the sum of its parts.* Watch the whole thing and your specific reflections are too easily confused, overlaid with the larger themes or metaphors the filmmaker intends.

Extracted from different films, in

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the sequences—isolated from what went before as well as what came after—I saw more clearly what Cukor, Wellman, Hitchcock did. I saw they shared a concept that although the motion picture may well be an expression of man's toils and troubles, triumphs and prat-falls, tragic, comic and *ART*, it is withal, and perhaps above all too, an *entertainment* for the audience.

Sharing the concept that a carefully constructed plot, a story with a beginning, middle, and end, was part of what a film presented, this audience would be held by the action, the tension of what was going to happen next.

Also—since part of the system under which they worked was THE STAR—the characters in their films were usually archetypes (if they worked) or stereotypes (if they didn't) of easily recognizable (but not simplistic) human types: heroes and villains, fall-guys, winners, connections, and patsies. Partly due to the actors, mostly superb at their craft, and dedicated through the system to establishing a persona that transcended the role, it was also due to the nature of film being visual. A Bogart, Tracy, or Peter Lorre; the audience recognized where he stood, and what he stood for, as soon as he appeared on the screen.

These characteristics of those films from that nostalgic time, including the fact that it too was shot almost exclusively on the back lot, are also in *The Sting*.

2.

the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limit of desire . . .
A definition of Myth
—Northrop Frye

Myth tells of the exploits of Gods (those supersize figures in full color on that big screen), in their battles (much larger than our life up there on that screen too), who enact our wishes and our dreams. Characteristic of myth is that it can be believed—religious, political, heroic, and/or (what *The Sting* is) societal. "Like any other large body of knowledge, with a profound appeal, that can be alluded to, myth offers the past an instant means of communication." And, according to Jung, may rest in the pre-conscious of all of us.

The appeal of the mythic hero, an archetype, is that his virtue is rightness. (And he is even more appealing if, like Zeus in the *Odyssey*, he has a few flaws.) He may very well wear a white hat in the movie, as John Wayne did in his first epic role in John Ford's classic *Stagecoach*. The John Wayne in that film is a "a natural phenomenon," Richard Schickel said another time, "the geological remnant of a vanished age."

And as for wrongness—and this character is by definition the object of wrong—it can be righted by honesty, or by honest dishonesty. In the Western it is often righted by guns or fists, but these are the unsophisticated crude tests of the primitive. If it could be done with the mind, so nobody gets hurt, but still the villain (who may wear a black [hat] suit, be a cripple who walks with a limp, and can kill without emotion) is not only punished but *defeated* by losing the only thing that means anything to him—money?

An action picture, *The Sting* opens with Robert Redford running, and it speeds on until the last exit at the end. The speed with which it proceeds, in addition to holding the audience in thrall for what is going to happen next, also forces a kind of exterior simplicity on the story, in which—in fact—there is not much depth. But the audience feelings this story evokes—hooks—are multifariously complex.

Living as we do in this time of travail, of distrust of institutions, government, industry, marriage, anything, we are alienated and isolated. It's very possible that part of this picture's appeal, of any film's appeal, is that there's a spirit in being in a theatre and sharing—if not each other—at least the fact of being entertained together.

Don't we feel conned by the world, feel like victims who are impotent? Even when we tried we got nothing for it but the lumps we got in trying, and that smarts. So we take that feeling and turn it around, and see in those two men, Hooker and Gondorf, ourselves. They make the switch, pull off the game we want to pull off ourselves.

In a game there are winners (as well as losers) and we know that from *some* of the fairy tales we were told when we were children and got our feelings straight out. If our life seems like a bad game, *The Sting* is a good one because it confirms what we wish to believe. That's life, tinged with a little larceny, it's still a lot of fun. We're not bored, and in the end the villain gets his just deserts.

Is it possible that the flowering of American film, seen in "The Men Who Made The Movies," arising in the decade when the people were subject —as now—to terrible internal pressure and fear, came partly from the very need of the people for the distraction that film offered—and that we are witness to such a time again?

3.

Illusion: something that deceives by producing a false impression

The Sting is separated into parts, each introduced by a title card, and the very traditional picture of a page turning—as though it were a book.

But it isn't; it's a film, and this illusion is only one trick of the trade. Besides that, it suggests the salient difference between film (visual) and literature (verbal). On the page words must fill in the background, describe the setting in front of which the characters speak and act; on the screen the characters still speak although a most telling shot is often the silent reaction—a *look*—but the picture always presents the background, the place in which the characters are. And, for once, that a picture is more telling than a thousand words is often true.

Ivor Montagu, in *Film World*, wrote that Fellini "synthesizes a whole from separate shots. It enables him to turn the spectator into an ideal observer, because he can enable the latter to see aspects which would normally be unavailable to an observer in real life.

"It enables him to compose each aspect from a viewpoint that emphasizes the form most suitable to that aspect alone. It allows him to show the *nothing but* that he desires to emphasize. The close-up, for example, derives even more expressive significance from what it excludes than from what it discloses.

"It enables him to make his com-

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munication with absolute clarity and precision, since the spectator cannot see anything else of the phenomenon depicted but the aspects the director chooses to show him in the order, for the duration chosen by the director."

As Antonioni has been known to paint the reality of his backgrounds (trees, yet) a color he feels is closer to the emotional tone he wishes to portray, so Fellini would rather build sets in a studio—even the exteriors of *Satyricon*—to have his control: of light, of color, of texture.

In *Day for Night*, the real Truffaut, playing the director, speaks ironically (showing the set of the Paris street, and the machines that make snow) of the fact that films are no longer made on studio lots, that the film within the film (*Meet Pamela*) is an anachronism. And the reason is it costs too much.

In a recent issue of *Filmmaker's Newsletter* (Vol. 7, No. 3) Martin Scorsese spoke of compromise in the making of *Mean Streets*. They didn't have enough money to shoot at night, to fly actors to New York for the exteriors . . . he denied it hurt the film, but I'm sure it hurt a lot in the filming.

I walked in the back lot of the Burbank Studio in January. I went on a busman's holiday and took the guided tour of Universal Pictures, where, from the shelter of your Teamster-driven tram, you get to experience all kinds of motion picture magic. The waters of the Red Sea *part*. You experience the *fury* of a tropical typhoon. They take you inside a big stage to show you where and how they shoot exteriors for westerns that appear on TV.

It was a cold, rainy day and the illusions didn't really get to me. I know a lot about all that, and my cynicism matched that of our girl guide, and hers was written in her script. But now that I have been thinking about *The Sting*, which was shot almost entirely on the Universal lot, I remember how she changed—with the flick of a switch—the lighting of that interior/exterior, the chuck wagon among the rubber rocks. She talked about the control that gave in filming, and that meant efficiency and economy, which in Hollywood, means money. But now, as I think about Fellini, and Truffaut, and *The Sting*, I remember it also has to do with art.

So it is all illusion, from the Red Sea to inside Stage 20 where you find out how to make rain—when you want it. And it only really works when you see it on film; the image is necessary for the make-believe to be real. But it's also like when I was a child, and ran these epics on a screen in my head.

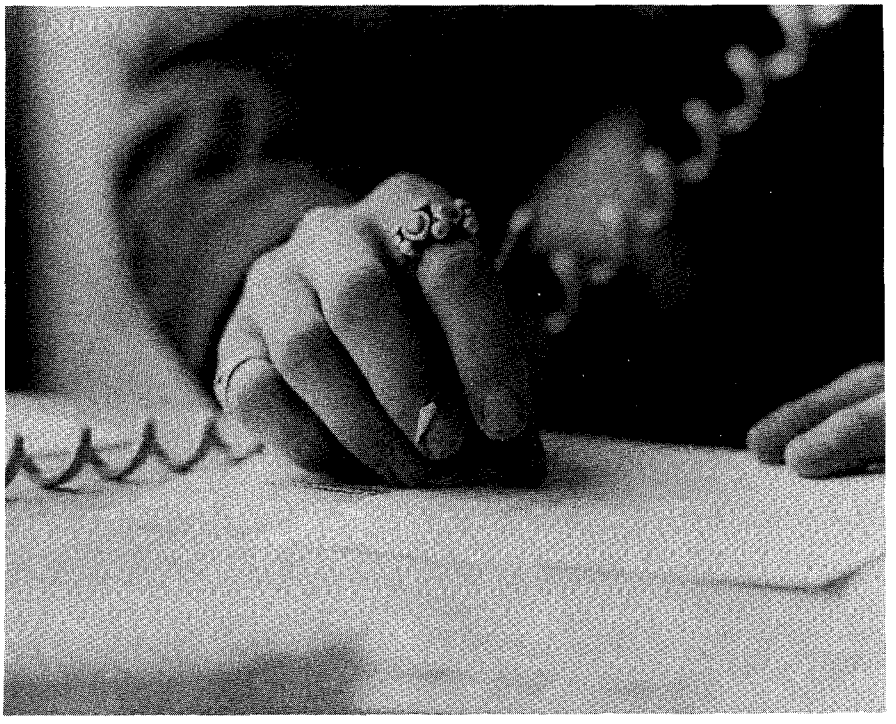
If you're sophisticated, about art direction, scene painting, and miniatures, look carefully at *The Sting* and you will see the brush strokes, the plaster that looks like stone, and the model trains. But look at it positively, starting with the tracking shot where the desolation of the depression litters the Universal back lot street. The Property Department and Scenic Artists are responsible, and it's part of the art.

You don't have to be that sophisticated to note the turning-page-shot, the titles, the wipes that act as transitions, and if they seem a little strange it's because most of these effects have not been in common usage since the time when all movies were shot on one back lot or another—back again to The Men Who Made The Movies. Old enough to remember or young enough to learn, that feeling is nostalgia.

The Sting appeals to our nostalgia, a complex combination of the preconscious, available memory, and assimilation. It's a simple human feeling that things weren't always as they are now. It's a desire to return to a time—illusionary as it really is—when it was black and white, not all grey.

In *The Sting* we are conned, because there it is. The good guys are really good guys, and they win. (And notice too that some flaws are evident in Zeus.) Gondorf, with Hooker watching, practices card tricks before he goes into the big game. When he slips and spills the whole deck, he looks up and grins deprecatingly, and in the audience you can almost hear the whisper: *yeah, not perfect; just like me!* At the end Hooker, the winner, says he might as well not pick up his share, he'll just blow it right away. *Just like me; can't win for losing*, the collective audience mutters to itself.

My nostalgia was even more personal. I knew Eileen Brennan when she was the star of "Little Mary Sunshine" in New York; Dana Elcar acted in the industrial films where I learned the craft of making films, and that was a tiny company called Unifilms. The date was 1954 and he was a good solid



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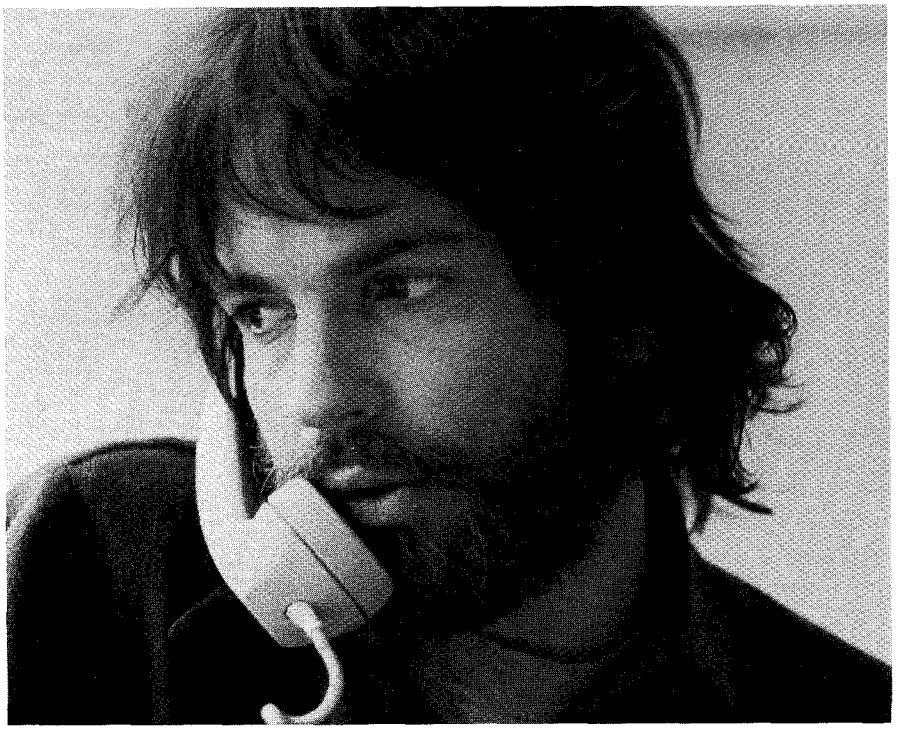

actor back then. Tony Bill, *The Sting*'s instigator and co-producer, used to be an actor, and I worked with him on Francis Ford Coppola's first personal film, *You're a Big Boy Now*. I have the credit of Production Consultant on *Rachel – Rachel*, the first picture Paul Newman directed.

4.

Hollywood's a strange place. In January I was looking at it with new eyes, and for half the time I saw it in the rain, listening to an FM radio station that wanted to be–and wasn't quite–underground. There was one song they kept playing about the rain–about 12 times a day.

Although I have spent a lot of years involved in making movies, very little of the time was in Southern California; this three weeks in January was the longest continuous time I was ever there. I had forgotten how much is transacted in the motion picture business on the telephone. "You define your status in town by how fast people call you back," one friend told me, with a kind of gallows laugh.

On Sunset Boulevard, at his office in Tomorrow Entertainment, Tony Bill and I met twice. Both times the sun was shining, and he was interrupted frequently by telephone calls.

* * *

His first credit as Producer was *Deadhead Miles*, directed by Vernon Zimmerman, and written by Terry Malick; costing 1.5 million dollars, the picture has never been released. *Steelyard Blues*, directed by Alan Myerson, written by David Ward, was second.

"It did ok," he said. "In some places it's become a kind of cult film, and it was the first screenplay of its author, and the first directing job of its director."

A reputation for going with first-timers since acquired, when Tony Bill met Ward he asked him what he wanted to do in the future? Ward told him about the idea of two grifters and a big con–what became *The Sting*.

And what was learned out of the first two films? He told me with *Deadhead Miles* he thinks he should have fired the director as soon as he saw an interpretation of the script different from the writer's and his own. Perhaps, coming from being an actor with a built in point of view of a director's prerogatives, he assumed an unreal reverence for the position, which he now knows it doesn't carry.

His reservation about *Steelyard Blues* is that it was a kind of round robin of "tenuous personal ties." The feeling, which I paraphrase, is one that happens too much in the business, and it works against the values in a good script. The script, I heard him saying, should be the first criterion of whether a film should be made. It should not be a group of friends or lovers banding together to find *something* they want to do.

* * *

LS: Those are your three credits as Producer–and that was in roughly three years, so it was like a picture a year?

TB: Right.

LS: And third was *The Sting*?

TB: Yes, a picture developed from an idea David Ward told me in my office, that's how it was born. It's a picture that I care a lot about on film level, though it's not a personal film, and doesn't represent my personal view of life. But, I thought it would be a very entertaining film. I thought that from the minute I heard the idea, and the title. It was written for Robert Redford. Paul Newman was brought in at the suggestion of the director, over my objections, but not unhappily finally.

LS: You weren't happy at the suggestion–?

TB: Yes, at that time, but now I think he's *terrific*.

LS: Your objection was that he and Redford had worked together before?

TB: I didn't want it to be another *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. And it's not.

LS: Some of the publicity tends to leave that impression.

TB: Yes, you can't avoid that.

* * *

LS: How much did it cost?

TB: Four and one half million dollars, and another million in overhead.

LS: How come?

TB: Well, first of all, it was a period picture. Everything had to be built or dressed. It was shot on a back lot, and that's very expensive. At that, I think we got our money's worth. Because the actual

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below-the-line was less than three million. The above-the-line was very heavy; George, and the two stars—that whole figure was, let's see—over a million and a half . . . almost two million dollars above-the-line. But, I think we got our money's worth in production values.

(A motion picture budget is separated into two parts by an actual line. Above-the-line refers to the cost of the creative talent: the script, the actors, the producer, the director. Below-the-line are the mechanical talent: the cameraman, the production department, the art director, and crew [all of whom can be equally creative]; and the machines: the camera and lights; the film; the props and sets; laboratory and editing, music, taxes, licenses, morning coffee, and overhead.)

* * *

LS: Do you see any irony in the fact that it cost more to shoot on the lot than it would have on real locations . . .?

TB: We couldn't find the real locations —they didn't exist.

LS: What lot was it on?

TB: Universal . . .

LS: Where the Red Sea parts . . . What kind of problems did you have in production—or was it very smooth?

TB: Very smooth! That much money greases a lot of wheels.

LS: How long did you shoot?

TB: Sixteen weeks.

LS: Sixteen weeks? Almost four months, that's a lot. Do you have any idea how much you shot per day? In terms of script pages?

(If there are 120 pages in a script—which by rule-of-thumb is 120 minutes of film—so too by deciding how many pages you plan to shoot each day you know how long a shooting schedule you will have—another rule-of-thumb.)

TB: Oh—probably two pages a day.

LS: How come? That seems slow to me.

TB: I figure three or four pages is usual, but we did get a lot done, and then it was a very complicated picture—a lot of moves, set-ups. There was intricate action and when you have *period* cars, and *period* extras, and *period* effects—when you're working with two superstars, with a crew of a hundred guys moving around, it just seems to take more time to set everything up.

LS: Was it more or less edited in the shooting, in the camera? Or was it covered?

TB: George Roy Hill knows exactly what he wants. Every shot. There was almost nothing that isn't in the final cut.

LS: And it was a Universal crew?

TB: Yes, all Universal people.

LS: When you work on a lot like Universal, does that mean you take their overhead situation?

TB: Yes, pretty much so. I was leery of it up front, but as it turned out we had a fine crew. I don't think the picture was featherbedded. On the other hand I don't think we got a million dollars worth of help from Universal, but that was the deal.

LS: Overhead is a term you hear all the time, and not everyone is sure exactly . . .

TB: Overhead is a percentage of the budget of the picture, ranging from 10% at the bottom, to 25% at the top. The studio tacks that to the budget of the film for their services; for example: the sound stages, existing rolling stock—trucks—props are free, costumes—if they have them—are free. Whatever the studio has lying around is yours free except that it's not free—it's covered by overhead. To some degree it's a real cost—their publicity department is paid for out of the overhead; the studio people who work on the picture, department heads and so forth, they are taken care of by the overhead.

LS: What if a picture's not shot on the lot, but on location, the studio still charges overhead . . .

TB: Ostensibly that covers the bookkeeping, the accounting, the publicity, the advertising, the executive functions—whatever they may be —plus the use of their money.

LS: Perhaps it is ironic that shooting on the lot with a studio crew and everything to hand is slower than it would be with a low budget picture shot on location. As you say, 'the money greases the wheels!' It lends an air of security. There's an inertia bred out of having everything, a ponderous slowness that comes, sometimes, just because everything is there; in one way that is good. The production of *The Sting* was smooth; it's fantastically successful in release—budgets, the schedule, those things become unimportant because of its success. And given all that, what are your aesthetic feelings about it?

TB: It realizes the basic appeal of the script. Plot appeal, the *what's-gonna-happen-next* kind of appeal. If it does not present warm, intimate characters, that's because they're not written as that. They are the people that David Ward wrote, and what they are is part of the plot . . . I like the picture. And I *love* the script! I even took it down a few days ago to re-read it, just for the pleasure of reading such a well written script.

LS: You should have such good fortune with the picture you're now going to direct as a first timer—*Danceland* . . .

TB: Yes, thank you . . .

* * *

LS: So, let me ask the question, which is also the first one. I saw the picture and I like it enormously too. Recently I also saw Aram Avakian's *Cops and Robbers*, which I also like very much (and am pleased about because Aram is an old friend of mine) but the point—finally, is my awareness when I saw *The Sting*, that like *Cops and Robbers*, it ended on a joke . . .

TB: *Joke*—?

LS: Yes, in . . .

TB: Yes, it's true—

LS: The shoot-out at the climax, and then the moment when you think they're really dead, it's very heavy. And then Hooker's eyes open, and Newman gets up and . . .

TB: Right.

LS: It just takes away all the fear and apprehension. It releases something in the theatre you can feel, some great sigh of exultation—it's really terrific. And feeling that is the way you walk away—*terrific*! □

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